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STUDIES OF SHAKSPERE:

INTRODUCTORY VOLUME,

CONTAINING

A HISTORY OF OPINION

ON THE

Writings of Shakspeare;

WITH

THE CHRONOLOGY OF HIS PLAYS.

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CHARLES KNIGHT,

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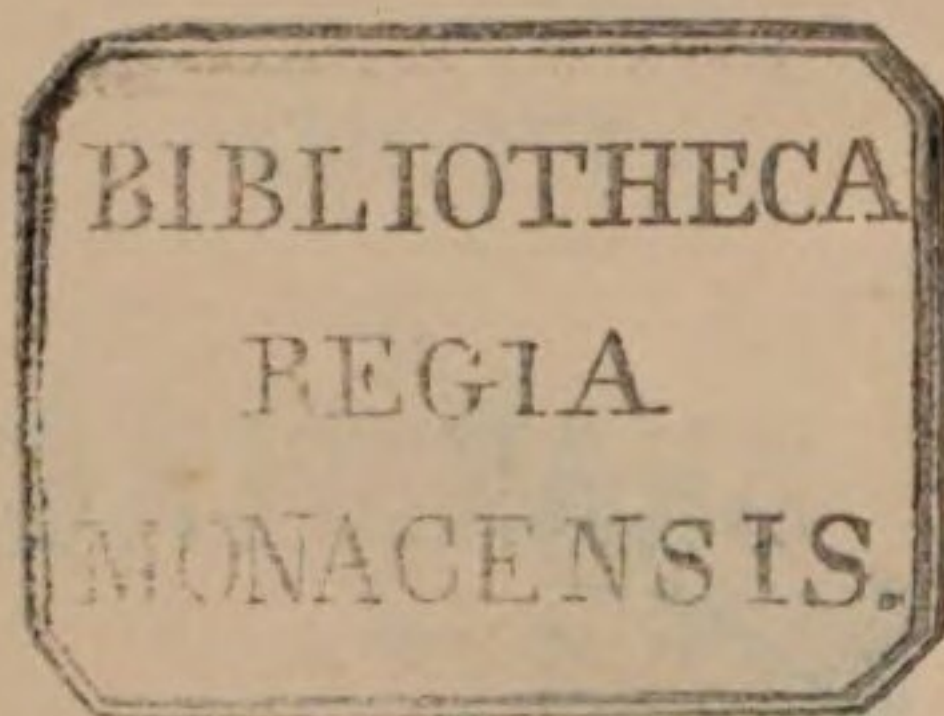
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MONACENSIS.

HISTORY OF OPINION
ON THE
WRITINGS OF SHAKSPERE.

CHAPTER I.

THE rank as a writer which Shakspeare took amongst his contemporaries is determined by a few decided notices of him. These notices are as ample and as frequent as can be looked for in an age which had no critical records, and when writers, therefore, almost went out of their way to refer to their literary contemporaries, except for purposes of set compliment.

The belief was implicitly adopted by Dryden and Rowe, that the reputation of Shakspeare as a comic poet was distinctly recognised by Spenser in 1591. Shakspeare's great contemporary, in a poem, entitled "The Tears of the Muses," originally published in that year, describes, in

the "Complaint" of Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, the state of the drama at the time in which he is writing : —

" Where be the sweet delights of learning's treasure,
That wont with comic stock to beautify
The painted theatres, and fill with pleasure
The listeners' eyes, and ears with melody;
In which I late was wont to reign as queen,
And mask in mirth with graces well beseen?

O! all is gone; and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits,
Is lay'd a-bed, and nowhere now to see;
And in her room unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow brows and grissly countenance,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliance.

And him beside sits ugly Barbarism,
And brutish Ignorance, ycrept of late
Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm,
Where being bred, he light and heaven does hate;
They in the minds of men now tyrannize,
And the fair scene with rudeness foul disguise.

All places they with folly have possess'd,
And with vain toys the vulgar entertain;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilom wont to wait upon my train, —
Fine Counterfescance, and unhurtful Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort."

Spenser was in England in 1590-1, and it is probable, that "The Tears of the Muses" was written in 1590, and that the poet described the prevailing state of the drama in London during the time of his visit. We have tolerable evidence

That the performances of the company at the Blackfriars Theatre, of which Shakspeare was then a shareholder, were exceptions to the character of the general performances. But there were several other theatres in London. In some of these their licence to entertain the people was abused by the introduction of matters connected with religion and politics ; so that, in 1589, Lord Burghley not only directed the lord mayor to inquire what companies of players had offended, but a commission was appointed for the same purpose. How Shakspeare's company proceeded during this inquiry has been made out most clearly by the valuable document discovered at Bridgewater House by Mr. Collier, wherein they disclaim to have conducted themselves amiss.

In this petition, Shakspeare, a sharer in the theatre, but with others below him in the list, says, and they all say, that "they have never brought into their plays matters of state and religion." The public mind in 1589-90, was furiously agitated by "matters of state and religion." A controversy was going on which is now known as that of *Martin Marprelate*, in which the constitution and discipline of the church were most furiously attacked in a succession of pamphlets ; and they were defended with equal violence and scurrility. Izaak Walton says, — "There was not only one Martin Marprelate, but other venomous books daily printed and dispersed — books that were so absurd and

scurrilous, that the graver divines disdained them an answer." Walton adds, — "And yet these were grown into high esteem with the common people, till Tom Nashe appeared against them all, who was a man of a sharp wit, and the master of a scoffing, satirical, merry pen." Connected with this controversy, there was, subsequently, a more personal one between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey; but they were each engaged in the Marprelate dispute. Nashe was a writer for the theatre, and so was John Lyly, the author of one of the most remarkable pamphlets produced on this occasion, called "Pap with a Hatchet." Harvey, it must be observed, was the intimate friend of Spenser; and in a pamphlet which he dates from Trinity Hall, November 5. 1589, he thus attacks the author of "Pap with a Hatchet," the more celebrated Euphuist, whom Sir Walter Scott's novel has made familiar to us: —

"I am threatened with a bable, and Martin menaced with a comedy — a fit motion for a jester and a player to try what may be done by employment of his faculty. Bables and comedies are parlous fellows to decipher and discourage men (that is the point) with their witty flouts and learned jerks, enough to lash any man out of countenance. Nay, if you shake the painted scabbard at me, I have done; and all you that tender the preservation of your good names were best to please Pap-Hatchet, and fee Euphues betimes, for fear lest he be moved, or some one

of his apes hired, to make a play of you, and then is your credit quite undone for ever and ever. Such is the public reputation of their plays. He must needs be discouraged whom they decipher. Better anger an hundred other than two such that have the stage at commandment, and can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure." *

We thus see that Harvey, the friend of Spenser, is threatened by one of those who "have the stage at commandment" with having a play made of him. Such plays were made in 1589, and Nashe thus boasts of them in one of his tracts printed in 1589: — "Methought *Vetus Comœdia* began to prick him at London in the right vein, when he brought forth Divinity with a scratched face, holding of her heart as if she were sick, because Martin would have forced her; but missing of his purpose, he left the print of his nails upon her cheeks, and poisoned her with a vomit which he ministered unto her to make her cast up her dignities." Lyly, taking the same side, writes, — "Would those *comedies* might be allowed to be played that are penned, and then I am sure he [Martin Marprelate] would be *deciphered*, and so perhaps *discouraged*." Here are the very words which Harvey has repeated, — "He must needs be *discouraged* whom they *decipher*." Harvey, in a subsequent passage of

* Pierce's "Supererogation." Reprinted in "Archæica," p. 137.

the same tract, refers to this prostitution of the stage to party purposes in very striking words : — “The stately tragedy scorneth the trifling comedy, and the trifling comedy flouteth the new ruffianism.” These circumstances appear to us very remarkable, with reference to the state of the drama about 1590 ; and we hope that we do not attach any undue importance to them from the consideration that we were the first to point out their intimate relation with Spenser’s “Tears of the Muses,” and the light which, as it appears to us, that poem *thus viewed* throws upon the dramatic career of Shakspeare.*

The four stanzas which we have quoted from Spenser are descriptive, as we think, of a period of the drama when it had emerged from the semi-barbarism by which it was characterised ; “from the commencement of Shakspeare’s boyhood, till about the earliest date at which his removal to London can be possibly fixed.”† This description has nothing in common with those accounts of the drama which have reference to this “semi-barbarism.” Nor does the writer of it belong to the school which considered a violation of the unities of time and place as the great defect of the English theatre. Nor does he assert his preference of the classic school over the romantic, by objecting, as Sir Philip Sidney objects, that “plays be neither right tragedies

* Life of Shakspeare in “Store of Knowledge.”

† Edinburgh Review, vol. lxxi., p. 469.

nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns.”
There had been, according to Spenser, a state of
the drama that would

“ Fill with pleasure
The listeners’ eyes, and ears with melody.”

Can any comedy be named, if we assume that
Shakspeare had, in 1590, not written any, which
could be celebrated—and by the exquisite versi-
fier of The “ Fairy Queen ”—for its “ melody ? ”
Could any also be praised for

“ That goodly glee
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits ? ”

Could the plays before Shakspeare be described by
the most competent of judges—the most poetical
mind of that age next to Shakspeare—as abound-
ing in

“ Fine Counterfesance, and unhurtful Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deck’d in seemly sort ? ”

We have not seen such a comedy, except some
three or four of Shakspeare’s, which could have
existed before 1590 ; we do not believe there is
such a comedy from any other pen. What,
according to the “ Complaint ” of Thalia, has
banished such comedy ? “ Unseemly Sorrow,”
it appears, has been fashionable ;—not the pro-
prieties of tragedy, but a Sorrow

“ With *hollow brows* and *grissly* countenance ; ”—

the violent scenes of blood which were offered
for the excitement of the multitude, before the

tragedy of real art was devised. But this state of the drama is shortly passed over. There is something more defined. By the side of this false tragic, sit “ugly Barbarism and brutish Ignorance.” These are not the barbarism and ignorance of the *old* stage ; — they are

“ Ycrept of late

Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm.”

They “*now* tyrannise ;” they now “disguise” the fair scene “with *rudeness*.” This description was published in 1591 ; it was probably written in 1590. The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene, had previously described the “rueful spectacles” of “the stage.” It was a stage which had no “true tragedy.” But it *had* possessed

“ Delight, and Laughter, deck’d in seemly sort.”

Now “the trifling comedy flouteth *the new ruffianism*.” The words of Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser agree in this. The bravos that “have the stage at commandment can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure,” says Harvey. This describes the *Vetus Comœdia*—the old comedy—of which Nashe boasts. Can there be any doubt that Spenser had this state of things in view when he denounced the

“ Ugly Barbarism,

And brutish *Ignorance*, ycrept of late

Out of dread darkness of the deep absym ? ”

He denounced it in common with his friend Harvey, who, however he partook of the contro-

versial violence of his time, was a man of learning and eloquence; and to whom, only three years before, he had addressed a sonnet of which the highest mind in the country might have been proud.

But we must return to the "Thalia." The four stanzas which we have quoted are immediately followed by these four others:—

" All these, and all that else the comic stage
With season'd wit and goodly pleasure grac'd,
By which man's life in his likest image
Was limned forth, are wholly now defac'd;
And those sweet wits, which wont the like to frame,
Are now despis'd, and made a laughing game.

And he, the man whom Nature self had made
To mock herself and Truth to imitate,
With kindly counter, under mimic shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late:
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

Instead thereof scoffing Scurrility,
And scornful Folly, with Contempt, is crept,
Rolling in rhymes of shameless ribaldry,
Without regard of due decorum kept;
Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
And doth the Learned's task upon him take.

But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
Than so himself to mockery to sell."

Here there is something even stronger than what has preceded it, in the direct allusion to the state of the stage in 1590. Comedy had ceased to be an exhibition of “seasoned wit,” and “goodly pleasure;” it no longer showed “man’s life in his likest image.” Instead thereof, there was “Scurrility”—“scornful Folly”—“shameless Ribaldry;”—and “each idle wit”

“doth the Learned’s task upon him take.”

It was the task of “the Learned” to deal with the high subjects of religious controversy—the “matters of state and religion,” with which the stage had meddled. Harvey had previously said, in the tract quoted by us, it is “a godly motion, when *interluders* leave penning their pleasurable plays to become zealous ecclesiastical writers.” He calls Lyly more expressly, with reference to this meddling, “the foolmaster of the theatre.” In this state of things the acknowledged head of the comic stage was silent for a time:—

“HE, the man whom Nature self had made
To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
With *kindly* counter, under mimic shade,
Our pleasant WILLY, ah! is dead of late.”

And the author of “The Fairy Queen” adds,

“But that same *gentle* spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so madly throw,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
Than so himself to *mockery* to sell.”

The love of personal abuse had driven out real comedy ; and there was *one* who, for a brief season, had left the madness to take its course. We cannot doubt that

“ HE, the man whom Nature self had made
To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,”

was *William Shakspeare*.

In 1592 was published a pamphlet, entitled “Groat’s worth of Wit,” a posthumous tract of the dramatist Robert Greene.

The entire pamphlet of Greene is, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary fragments of autobiography that the vanity or the repentance of a sinful man ever produced. The recital which he makes of his abandoned course of life involves not only a confession of crimes and follies which were common to a very licentious age, but of particular and especial depravities, which even to mention argues as much shamelessness as repentance. The portion, however, which relates to the subject before us stands alone, in conclusion, as a friendly warning out of his own terrible example : — “ To those gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plays, R. G. wisheth a better exercise, and wisdom to prevent his extremities.” To three of his quondam acquaintance the dying man addresses himself. To the first, supposed to be Marlowe — “ thou famous gracer of trage-

dians" — he speaks in words as terrible as came from

" that warning voice, which he who saw
Th' Apocalypse heard cry in heav'n aloud."

In exhorting his friend to turn from atheism, he ran the risk of consigning him to the stake, for Francis Kett was burnt for his opinions only three years before Greene's death. That Marlowe resented this address to him, we have the testimony of Chettle the editor of Greene's posthumous pamphlet. With his second friend, supposed to be Lodge, his plain speaking is much more tender: "Be advised, and get not many enemies by bitter words." He addresses the third, supposed to be Peele, as one "driven as myself to extreme shifts;" and he adds, "thou art unworthy better hap sith thou dependest on so mean a stay." What is the stay? "Making plays." The exhortation then proceeds to include the three "gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance that spend their wits in making plays." — "Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned: for unto none of you, like me, sought those burs to cleave; those puppets, I mean, that speak from our mouths; those antics garnished in our colours." Up to this point the meaning is perfectly clear. The puppets, the antics, — by which names of course are meant the players, whom he held, and justly, to derive their chief importance from the labours of the

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poet, in the words which they uttered and the colours with which they were garnished, — had once cleaved to him like burs. But a change had taken place: “Is it not strange that I, to whom they all have been beholding — is it not like that you, to whom they all have been beholding, shall, were ye in that case that I am now, be, both, of them at once forsaken?” This is a lamentable picture of one whose powers, wasted by dissipation and enfeebled by sickness, were no longer required by those to whom they had once been serviceable. As he was forsaken, so he holds that his friends will be forsaken. And chiefly for what reason? “Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that, with *his tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank-verse as the best of you: and, being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.” There can be no doubt that Shakspeare was here pointed at; that the starving man spoke with exceeding bitterness of the successful author; that he affected to despise him as a player; that, if “beautified with our feathers” had a stronger meaning than “garnished with our colours,” it conveyed a vague charge of borrowing from other poets; and that he, Greene, parodied a line from “*The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*,” which we hold to be Shakspeare’s performance; and which does not differ, in any very material

degree from the third part of Henry VI. Greene proceeds to exhort his friends "to be employed in more profitable courses." — "Let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions." — "Seek you better masters." It is perfectly clear that these words refer only to the players generally; and, possibly, to the particular company of which Shakspeare was a member. As such, and such only, must he take his share in the names which Greene applies to them, of "apes," — "rude grooms," — "buckram gentlemen," — "peasants," — and "painted monsters." It has been held that Greene intended to accuse Shakspeare of robbing him of the profits of his labour, by new-modelling a work originally produced by him. We shall notice this matter in another place. It is sufficient here to mention, that the editor of the posthumous attack apologised to the "upstart crow:" — "I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault, because myself hath seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes: besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art." This apology was not written by Chettle at some distant period; it came out in the same year with the pamphlet which contained the insult.

There was an indistinct echo of Greene's complaint, by some "R. B." in 1594: —

“ Greene gave the ground to all who wrote upon him
Nay, more ; the men that so eclips’d his fame
Purloin’d his plumes, — can they deny the same ? ”

We believe that never yet any great author appeared in the world who was not reputed, in the onset of his career, to be a plagiarist ; or any great literary performance produced by one whose reputation had to be made, that was not held to be written by some one else than the man who did write it : there was some one behind the curtain — some mysterious assistant — whose possible existence was a consolation to the envious and malignant.

The passages in Spenser’s “ Tears of the Muses,” and Greene’s “ Groat’s worth of Wit,” which it is morally impossible to apply to any other man than Shakspeare, are still only indirect evidence of the opinion which was formed of him when he was yet a very young writer. But a few years later we encounter the most *direct* testimony to his pre-eminence. He it was that, in 1598, was assigned his rank, not by any vague and doubtful compliment, not with any ignorance of what had been achieved by other men ancient and modern, but by the learned discrimination of a scholar ; and that rank was with Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Æschylus, Sophocles, Pindar, Phocylides, and Aristophanes amongst the Greeks ; Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Silius-Italicus, Lucan, Lucretius, Ausonius, and Claudian amongst the

Latins ; and Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Marlowe, and Chapman amongst the English. According to the same authority, it was “in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakspeare” that “the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives.” This praise was applied to his Venus and Adonis, and other poems. But, for his dramas, he is raised above every native contemporary and predecessor : “As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins ; so Shakspeare among the English is *the most excellent* in both kinds for the stage.” These are extracts with which many of our readers must be familiar. They are from “The Wits’ Commonwealth” of Francis Meres, “Master of Arts of both Universities ;” a book largely circulated, and mentioned with applause by contemporary writers. The author delivers not these sentences as his own peculiar opinion ; he speaks unhesitatingly, as of a fact admitting no doubt, that Shakspeare, among the English, is the most excellent for Comedy and Tragedy. Does any one of the other “excellent” dramatic writers of that day rise up to dispute the assertion, galling, perhaps, to the self-love of some amongst them ? Not a voice is heard to tell Francis Meres that he has overstated the public opinion of the supremacy of Shakspeare. Thomas Heywood, one of this illustrious band, speaks of Meres as an approved good scholar ; and says that his account

of authors is learnedly done.* Heywood himself, indeed, in lines written long after Shakspeare's death, mentions him in stronger terms of praise than he applies to any of his contemporaries.† Lastly, Meres, after other comparisons of Shakspeare with the great writers of antiquity and of his own time, has these words, which nothing but a complete reliance upon the received opinion of his day could have warranted him in applying to any living man: "As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin; so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakspeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English."

Of the popularity of Shakspeare in his own day, the external evidence, such as it is, is more decisive than the testimony of any contemporary writer. He was at one and the same time the favourite of the people and of the Court. There is no record whatever known to exist of the public performances of Shakspeare's plays at his own theatres. Had such an account existed of the re-

* "Here I might take fit opportunity to reckon up all our English writers, and compare them with the Greek, French, Italian, and Latin poets, not only in their pastoral, historical, elegiacal, and heroical poems, but in their tragical and comical subjects, but it was my chance to happen on the like, learnedly done by an approved good scholar, in a book called 'Wits' Commonwealth,' to which treatise I wholly refer you, returning to our present subject." — *Apology for Actors*, 1612.

† *Hierarchy of Blessed Angels*, 1635.

ceipts at the Blackfriars and the Globe as Henslowe kept for his company, we should have known something precise of that popularity which was so extensive as to make the innkeeper of Bosworth, "full of ale and history," derive his knowledge from the stage of Shakspeare: —

"For when he would have said, King Richard died,
And call'd, A horse, a horse! he Burbage cried."*

But the facts connected with the original publication of Shakspeare's plays sufficiently prove how eagerly they were for the most part received by the readers of the drama. From 1597 to 1600, ten of these plays were published from authentic copies, undoubtedly with the consent of the author. The system of publication did not commence before 1597; and, with four exceptions, it was not continued beyond 1600. Of these plays there were published, before the appearance of the collected edition of 1623, four editions of Richard II., six of The First Part of Henry IV., six of Richard III., four of Romeo and Juliet, six of Hamlet, besides repeated editions of the plays which were surreptitiously published—the maimed and imperfect copies described by the editors of the first folio. Of the thirty-six plays contained in the folio of 1623, only one-half was published, whether genuine or piratical, in the author's lifetime; and it is by no means improbable that many of those which were originally published

* Bishop Corbet, who died in 1635.

with his concurrence were not permitted to be reprinted, because such publication might be considered injurious to the great theatrical property with which he was connected. But the constant demand for some of the plays is an evidence of their popularity which cannot be mistaken ; and is decisive as to the people's admiration of Shakspeare. As for that of the Court, the testimony, imperfect as it is, is entirely conclusive : —

“ Sweet Swan of Avon ! what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear,
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James,”

is no vague homage from Jonson to the memory of his “beloved friend ;” but the record of a fact. The accounts of the revels at Court, between the years 1588 and 1604, the most interesting period in the career of Shakspeare, have not been discovered in the depositories for such papers. We have, indeed, memoranda of payments to her Majesty's players during this period, but nothing definite as to the plays represented. We know not what “so did take Eliza ;” but we are left in no doubt as to the attractions for “our James.” It appears from the Revels Book that, from Hallowmas-day, 1604, to the following Shrove Tuesday, there were thirteen plays performed before the King, eight of which were Shakspeare's, namely — Othello, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Measure for Measure, The Comedy

of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, Henry V., and The Merchant of Venice twice, that being "again commanded by the King's Majesty." Not one of these, with the possible exception of Measure for Measure, was recommended by its novelty. The series of the same accounts is broken from 1605 to 1611 ; and then from Hallowmas-night to Shrove Tuesday, which appears to have been the theatrical season of the Court, six different companies of players contribute to the amusements of Whitehall and Greenwich by the performance of twelve plays. Of five which are performed by the King's players, two are by Shakspeare, The Tempest, and The Winter's Tale. If the records were more perfect, this proof of the admiration of Shakspeare in the highest circle would, no doubt, be more conclusive. As it is, it is sufficient to support this general argument.*

During the life of Shakspeare his surpassing popularity appears to have provoked no expression of envy from his contemporaries, no attempt to show that his reputation was built upon an unsolid foundation. Some of the later commentators upon Shakspeare, however, took infinite pains to prove that Jonson had ridiculed him during his life, and disparaged him after his death. Every one knows Fuller's delightful picture of the convivial exercises in mental strength between Jonson and Shakspeare :—"Many were the wit-

* "Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court," by Peter Cunningham.

combats between Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. I behold them like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances; Shakspeare, like the latter, less in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention." Few would imagine that a passage such as this should have been produced to prove that there was a quarrel between Jonson and Shakspeare; that the wit-combats of these intellectual gladiators were the consequence of their habitual enmity. By the same perverse misinterpretation have the commentators sought to prove that, when Jonson, in his prologues, put forth his own theory of dramatic art, he meant to satirize the principles upon which Shakspeare worked. It is held that in the prologue to "Every Man in his Humour," acted in 1598 at Shakspeare's own theatre, Jonson especially ridicules the historical plays of Henry VI. and Richard III.:—

" With three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars."

There is in another author a similar ridicule, and stronger, of the inadequacy of the stage to present a battle to the senses:—

" We shall much disgrace—
With four or five most vile and ragged foils,

Right ill-dispos'd in brawl ridiculous —
The name of Agincourt."

But Shakspeare himself was the author of this passage ; and he was thus the satirist of himself, as much as Jonson was his satirist, when he compared, in his prologue, the comedy of manners with the historical and romantic drama which had then such attractions for the people. Shakspeare's Chorus to Henry V., from which we have made the last extract, was written the year after the performance of Jonson's play. We recognise in it a candid admission of the good sense of Jonson, which at once shows that Shakspeare was the last to feel the criticism as a personal attack. Nothing, in truth, can be more absurd than the attempts to show, from supposed allusions in Jonson, that he was an habitual detractor of Shakspeare. The reader will find these "proofs of Jonson's malignity" brought forward, and dismissed with the contempt that they deserve, in a paper appended to Gifford's "Memoir of Jonson." The same acute critic had the merit of pointing out a passage in Jonson's "Poetaster," which, he says, "is as undoubtedly true of Shakspeare as if it were pointedly written to describe him." He further says, "It is evident that throughout the whole of this drama Jonson maintains a constant allusion to himself and his contemporaries," and that, consequently, the lines in question were intended for Shakspeare : —

“ That which he hath writ
Is with such judgment labour'd and distill'd
Through all the needful uses of our lives,
That, could a man remember but his lines,
He should not touch at any serious point,
But he might breathe his spirit out of him.

His learning savours not the school-like gloss
That most consists in echoing words and terms,
And soonest wins a man an empty name ;
Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance
Wrapp'd in the curious general'ties of art ;
But a direct and analytic sum
Of all the worth and first effects of art.
And for his poesy, 'tis so ramm'd with life,
That it shall gather strength of life, with being,
And live hereafter more admir'd than now.”*

The private opinion of Jonson with regard to Shakspeare would not be so much a reflection of the popular judgment as that of the critical few who would apply the tests of ancient art, not only to the art of Shakspeare, but to the art of that great body of writers who had founded the English drama upon a broader foundation than the precepts of Aristotle. The art of Jonson was opposed to the art of Shakspeare. He satisfied the few, but the many rejected him. There is a poem on Jonson's “Sejanus,” which shows how his learned harangues—paraphrases for the most part of the ancient writers—were received by the English people:—

* The Poetaster, Act v. Scene 1.

“ When in the Globe’s fair ring, our world’s best stage,
I saw Sejanus, set with that rich foil,
I look’d the author should have borne the spoil
Of conquest from the writers of the age :
But when I view’d the people’s beastly rage,
Bent to confound thy grave and learned toil,
That cost thee so much sweat, and so much oil,
My indignation I could hardly assuage.”

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Jonson, in his free conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden, in January, 1619, should say that “ Shakspeare wanted art.” When Jonson said this he was in no laudatory mood. Drummond heads his record of the conversation thus : “ His censure of the English poets was this.” Censure is here, of course, put for opinion ; although Jonson’s opinions are by no means favourable to any one of whom he speaks. Spenser’s stanzas pleased him not, or his matter ; Sir John Harrington’s “ Ariosto,” under all translations, was the worst ; Abraham France was a fool ; Sidney did not keep a decorum in making every one speak as well as himself ; Shakspeare wanted art. And so, during two centuries, a mob of critics have caught up the word, and with the most knowing winks, and the most profound courtesies to each other’s sagacity, have they echoed — “ Shakspeare wanted art.” But a cunning interpolator, who knew the temper of the critics, the anonymous editor of Cibber’s “ Lives of the Poets,” took the “ heads of a con-

versation " between Jonson and Drummond, prefixed to Drummond's works in 1711, and bestowed a few finishing touches upon them, after his own fashion. And thus, to the great joy of the denouncers of anachronisms, and other Shakspearean absurdities, as they are pleased to call them, we have read as follows for a hundred years : — " He said, Shakspeare wanted Art, *and sometimes Sense* ; for, in one of his plays, he brought in a number of men, saying they had suffered shipwrack in Bohemia, where is no sea near by 100 miles." Jonson, indeed, makes the observation upon the shipwreck in Bohemia, but without any comment upon it. It is found in another part of Drummond's record, quite separate from " Shakspeare wanted art ; " a casual remark, side by side with Jonson's gossip about Sidney's pimpled face and Raleigh's plagiaries. It was probably mentioned by Jonson as an illustration of some principle upon which Shakspeare worked ; and in the same way " Shakspeare wanted art " was in all likelihood explained by him, in producing instances of the mode in which Shakspeare's art differed from his (Jonson's) art. It is impossible to receive Jonson's words as any support of the absurd opinion so long propagated that Shakspeare worked without labour and without method. Jonson's own testimony, delivered five years after the conversation with Drummond, offers the most direct evidence against such a construction of his expression : —

“ Yet must I not give Nature all : thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter Nature be,
His art doth give the fashion : and that he
Who casts to write a living line must sweat
(Such as thine are), and strike the second heat
Upon the Muses' anvil : turn the same
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame ;
Or, for the laurel, he may gain a scorn, —
For a good poet's made as well as born :
And such wert thou.”

There can be no difficulty in understanding Jonson's dispraise of Shakspeare, small as it was, when we look at the different characters of the two men. In his “ Discoveries,” written in his last years, there is the following passage :—“ I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakspeare, that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted ; and to justify mine own candour : for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature ; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions ; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped : Sufflaminandus erat, as Au-

gustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power ; would the rule of it had been so too." The players had said, in their preface to the first folio — " His mind and hand went together ; and what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." Jonson, no doubt, alludes to this assertion. But we are not, therefore, to understand that Shakspeare took no pains in perfecting what, according to the notion of his editors, he delivered with such easiness. The differences between the earlier and the later copies of some of his plays show, as we have repeatedly pointed out, the unremitting care and the exquisite judgment with which he revised his productions. The expression " without a blot " might, nevertheless, be perfectly true ; and the fact, no doubt, impressed upon the minds of Heminge and Condell what they were desirous to impress upon others, that Shakspeare was a writer of unequalled facility — " as he was a happy imitator of nature, he was a most gentle expresser of it." Jonson received this evidence of facility as a reproof to his own laborious mode of composition. He felt proud, and wisely so, of the commendations of his admirers, that his works cost him much sweat and much oil ; and when the players told him that Shakspeare never blotted out a line, he had his self-satisfied retort, " Would he had blotted a thousand." But this carelessness, as it appeared to Jonson, — this exuberant facility, as the

players thought,—was in itself no proof that Shakspeare did not elaborate his works with the nicest care. The same thing was said of Fletcher as of him. Humphrey Moseley, the publisher of Beaumont and Fletcher's works in 1647, says—“Whatever I have seen of Mr. Fletcher's own hand is free from interlining, and his friends affirm he never writ any one thing twice.” But the stationer does not put this forth as any proof of carelessness, for he most judiciously adds, “It seems he had that rare felicity to prepare and perfect all first in his own brain, to shape and attire his notions, to add or lop off before he committed one word to writing, and never touched pen till all was to stand as firm and immutable as if engraven in brass or marble.” This is the way, we believe, in which all works of great originality are built up. If Shakspeare blotted not a line, it was because he wrote not till he had laid the foundations, and formed the plan, and conceived the ornaments, of his wondrous edifices. The execution of the work was then an easy thing ; and the facility was the beautiful result of the previous labour.

But if Jonson expressed himself a little petulantly, and perhaps inconsiderately, about the boast of the players, surely nothing can be nobler than the hearty tribute which he pays to the memory of Shakspeare :—“I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any.” Unquestionably this is language

which shows that the memory of Shakspeare was cherished by others even to idolatry ; so that Jonson absolutely adopts an apologetical tone in venturing an observation which can scarcely be considered disparaging—"he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped." It was the facility that excited Jonson's critical comparison of Shakspeare with himself ; and it was in the same way that, when he wrote his noble verses "To the Memory of my Beloved Mr. William Shakespeare and what he hath left us," he could not avoid drawing a comparison between his own profound scholarship and Shakspeare's practical learning :—

" If I thought my judgment were of years,
 I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
 And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
 Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
 And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,
 From thence to honour thee I will not seek
 For names: but call forth thund'ring Eschylus,
 Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
 Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
 To live again, to hear thy buskin tread,
 And shake a stage: or, when thy socks were on,
 Leave thee alone for the comparison
 Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome
 Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

Nature herself was proud of his designs,
 And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines!
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.

The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;
But antiquated and deserted lie,
As they were not of Nature's family."

The interpretation of this passage is certainly not difficult. Its general sense is expressed by Gifford: — "Jonson not only sets Shakspeare above his contemporaries, but above the ancients whose works himself idolized, and of whose genuine merits he was perhaps a more competent judge than any scholar of his age." * The whole passage was unquestionably meant for praise, whatever opinion might be implied in it as to Shakspeare's learning. Looking to the whole construction and tendency of the passage, it may even be doubted whether Jonson intended to express a direct opinion as to Shakspeare's philological attainments. If we paraphrase the passage according to the common notion, it reads thus:— And although you knew little Latin and less Greek, to honour thee out of Latin and Greek I will not seek for names. According to this construction, the poet ought to have written, *because* "thou hadst small Latin," &c. But without any violence the passage may be read thus:— And *although* thou hadst in thy writings few images derived from Latin, and fewer from Greek authors, I will not thence (on that account) seek for names to honour thee, but call forth thun-

* Jonson's Works, vol. viii. p. 333.

dering Æschylus, &c. It is perfectly clear that Jonson meant to say, and not disparagingly, that Shakspeare was not an imitator. Immediately after the mention of Aristophanes, Terence, and Plautus, he adds,

“ Yet must I not give Nature all.”

The same tone of commendation was taken in Shakspeare's time by other writers. Digges says that he neither borrows from the Greeks, imitates the Latins, nor translates from vulgar languages. Drayton has these lines :—

“ Shakespeare, thou hadst as smooth a comic vein,
Fitting the sock, and in thy natural brain
As strong conception, and as clear a rage,
As any one that traffick'd with the stage.”*

To argue from such passages that the writers meant to reproach Shakspeare as an ignorant or even as an unlearned man, in the common sense of the word, was an absurdity that was not fully propounded to the world till the discovery of Dr. Farmer, that, because translations existed from Latin, Italian, and French authors in the time of Shakspeare, he was incapable of consulting the originals. This profound logician closes his judicial sentence with the following memorable

* Farmer, the most insolent of the race of piddling black-letter bibliographers, has the profligacy not to quote these lines, but to say, “ Drayton, the countryman and acquaintance of Shakspeare, determines his excellence to the natural brain *only*.”

words, which have become the true faith of the antiquarian critics up to this hour :—“ He remembered perhaps enough of his schoolboy learning to put the Hig, hag, hog, into the mouth of Sir Hugh Evans ; and might pick up in the writers of the time, or the course of his conversation, a familiar phrase or two of French or Italian.” There is, however, a contemporary testimony to the acquirements of Shakspeare which is of somewhat higher value than the assertions of any master “ of all such reading as was never read ”—of one, himself a true poet, who holds that all Shakspeare’s excellences were his freehold, but that his cunning brain improved his natural gifts :—

“ This and much more which cannot be express’d
 But by himself, his tongue and his own breast,
 Was Shakespeare’s *freehold*, which his *cunning brain*
Improv’d by favour of the ninefold train.
 The buskin’d Muse, the Comic Queen, the grand
 And louder tone of Clio ; nimble hand,
 And nimbler foot, of the melodious pair ;
 The silver-voiced Lady ; the most fair
 Calliope, whose speaking silence daunts,
 And she whose praise the heavenly body chants ;—
 These jointly woo’d him, envying one another,
 (Obey’d by all as spouse, but lov’d as brother,)
 And wrought a curious robe of sable grave,
 Fresh green, and pleasant yellow, red most brave,
 And constant blue, rich purple, guiltless white,
 The lowly russet, and the scarlet bright ;
 Branch’d and embroider’d like the painted spring,
 Each leaf match’d with a flower, and each string

Of golden wire, each line of silk; there run
Italian works whose thread the sisters spun;
And there did sing, or seem to sing, the choice
Birds of a foreign note and various voice.
Here hangs a mossy rock; there plays a fair
But chiding fountain purled: not the air,
Nor clouds, nor thunder, but were living drawn,
Not out of common tiffany or lawn,
But fine materials, which the Muses know,
And only know the countries where they grow.”*

But if the passage which we have previously quoted from “The Poetaster” be, as Gifford so plausibly imagined, intended for Shakspeare, it is decisive as to Jonson’s own opinion of his great friend’s acquirements: it is the opinion of every man, now, who is not a slave to the authority of the smallest minds that ever undertook to measure the vast poetical region of Shakspeare with their little tape, inch by inch:—

“His learning savours not the school-like gloss
That most consists in echoing words and terms,
And soonest wins a man an empty name.”

The verses of Jonson, prefixed to the folio of 1623, conclude with these remarkable lines:—

“Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheer, the drooping stage;
Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn’d like
night,
And despairs day, but for thy volume’s light.”

* Commendatory Verses, “On Worthy Master Shakspeare and his Poems,” by I. M. S.

From 1616, the year of Shakspeare's death, to 1623, the date of the first edition of his collected works, Jonson himself had written nothing for the stage. Beaumont had died the year before Shakspeare; but Fletcher alone was sustaining the high reputation which he had won with his accomplished associate. Massinger had been in London from 1606, known certainly to have written in conjunction with other dramatists before the period of Shakspeare's death, and, without doubt, assisting to fill the void which he had left, for "The Bondman" appears in the list of the Master of the Revels in 1623. The indefatigable Thomas Heywood was a writer for the stage from the commencement of the seventeenth century to the suppression of the theatres. Webster was a poet of Shakspeare's own theatre, immediately after his death, and a leading character in "The Duchess of Malfi" was played by Burbage. Rowley produced some of his best works at the same period. Chapman had not ceased to write. Ford was known as a rising poet. Many others were there of genius and learning who at this particular time were struggling for the honours of the drama, and some with great success. And yet Jonson does not hesitate to say, that since the death of Shakspeare the stage mourns like night. Leonard Digges, writing at the date of the publication of the folio, says of Shakspeare's dramas,—

“ Happy verse, thou shalt be sung and heard,
 When hungry quills shall be such honour barr’d.
 Then vanish, upstart writers to each stage,
 You needy poetasters of this age ! ”

This man speaks authoritatively, because he speaks the public voice. But it is not with the poetasters only that he compares the popularity of Shakspeare ; he tells us that the players of the Globe live by him dead ; and that prime judgments, rich veins,

“ have far’d

The worst with this deceased man compar’d ; ”

and he then proceeds to exhibit the precise character of the popular admiration of Shakspeare :—

“ So have I seen, when Cæsar would appear,
 And on the stage at half-sword parley were
 Brutus and Cassius, O, how the audience
 Were ravish’d ! with what wonder they went thence !
 When, some new day, they would not brook a line
 Of tedious, though well-labour’d, Catiline ;
 Sejanus too was irksome : they priz’d more
 ‘ Honest ’ Iago, or the jealous Moor.
 And though the Fox and subtle Alchymist,
 Long intermitted, could not long be miss’d,
 Though these have sham’d all th’ ancients, and might
 raise

Their author’s merit with a crown of bays,
 Yet these sometimes, even at a friend’s desire
 Acted, have scarce defray’d the sea-coal fire
 And door-keepers : when, let but Falstaff come,
 Hal, Poins, the rest,—you scarce shall have a room,
 All is so pester’d : Let but Beatrice
 And Benedict be seen, lo ! in a trice

The cockpit, galleries, boxes, all are full,
To hear Malvolio, that cross-garter'd gull.
Brief, there is nothing in his wit-fraught book,
Whose sound we would not hear, on whose worth look :
Like old-coin'd gold, whose lines in every page
Shall pass true current to succeeding age."

We have said enough, we think, to show how inconsiderate is the assertion, that Shakspeare's "pre-eminence was not acknowledged by his contemporaries." Should this fact, however, be still thought to be a matter of opinion, we will place the opinion of a real critic, not the less sound for being an enthusiastic admirer, against this echo of the babble of the cold and arrogant school of criticism that still has its disciples and its imitators : "Clothed in radiant armour, and authorised by titles sure and manifold as a poet, Shakspeare came forward to demand the throne of fame, as the dramatic poet of England. *His excellences compelled even his contemporaries to seat him on that throne, although there were giants in those days contending for the same honour.*" *

CHAPTER II.

"SHAKESPEAR was not so much esteemed, even during his life, as we commonly suppose ; and

* Coleridge's "Literary Remains," vol. ii. p. 53.

after his retirement from the stage he was all but forgotten.”* So we read in an authority too mighty to enter upon evidence. The oblivion after his retirement and death is the true *pendant* to the neglect during his life. When did the oblivion begin? It could scarcely have existed when, in, 1623, an expensive folio volume of many hundred pages was published, without regard to the risk of such an undertaking — and it was a risk, indeed, if the author had been neglected and was forgotten. But the editors of the volume do not ask timidly for support of these neglected and forgotten works. They say to the reader, “Though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on the stage at Blackfriars or the Cockpit, to arraign plays daily, know these plays have had their trial already, and stood out all appeals.” Did the oblivion continue when, in 1632, a second edition of this large work was brought out? There was one man, certainly — a young and ardent scholar — who was not amongst the oblivious. John Milton was twenty-four years of age when these verses were published: —

“AN EPITAPH ON THE ADMIRABLE DRAMATIC POET,
W. SHAKESPEARE.

“What need my Shakespeare for his honour’d bones
The labour of an age in piled stones,
Or that his hallow’d relics should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?

* Life of Shakspeare in “Lardner’s Cyclopædia.”

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such dull witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a lasting monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow endeavouring art
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou, our fancy of herself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die."

The author of these lines could not have known the works of the "admirable dramatic poet," while that poet was in life; but sixteen years after his death he was the dear son of memory, the great heir of fame; his bones were honoured, his relics were hallowed, his works were a lasting monument, his book was priceless, his lines were oracular, Delphic. Is this oblivion? But it may be said that Milton was a young enthusiast, one who saw farther than the million; that the public opinion of a writer (and we are not talking of his positive excellence, apart from opinion) must be sought for in the voice of the people, or at any rate in that of the leaders of the people. How are we to arrive at the knowledge of this expression? We can only know, incidentally, that an author was a favourite, either of a king or of a cobbler. We know that Shakspeare was the favourite of a king, in these times of his oblivion. A distinguished writer says, "The Prince of

Wales had learned to appreciate Shakspeare, not originally from reading him, but from witnessing the court representations of his plays at Whitehall. Afterwards we know that he made Shakspeare his closet companion, for he was reproached with doing so by Milton.* The concluding words are founded upon a mistake of the passage in Milton. Charles is not *reproached* with reading Shakspeare. The great republican does not condemn the king for having made the dramatic poet the closet companion of his solitudes; but, speaking of the dramatic poet as a well-known author with whom the king was familiar, he cites out of him a passage to show that pious words might be found in the mouth of a tyrant. The passage not only proves the familiarity of Charles with Shakspeare, but it evidences also Milton's familiarity; and, what is of more importance, the familiarity even of those stern and ascetic men to whom Milton was peculiarly addressing his opinions. The passage of the "Iconoclastes" is as follows: "Andronicus Comnenus, the Byzantine emperor, though a most cruel tyrant, is reported by Nicetas to have been a constant reader of Saint Paul's epistles; and by continual study had so incorporated the phrase and style of that transcendent apostle into all his familiar letters, that the imitation seemed to vie with the original. Yet this availed not to deceive the

* Mr. De Quincey's "Life of Shakespeare" in the "Encyclopædia Britannica."

people of that empire, who, notwithstanding his saint's vizard tore him to pieces for his tyranny. From stories of this nature, both ancient and modern, which abound, the poets also, and some English, have been in this point so mindful of decorum as to put never more pious words in the mouth of any person than of a tyrant. I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the king might be less conversant, but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakespeare, who introduces the person of Richard the Third, speaking in as high a strain of piety and mortification as is uttered in any passage of this book *, and sometimes to the same sense and purpose with some words in this place : ' I intended,' saith he, ' not only to oblige my friends, but my enemies.' The like saith Richard, Act II., Scene I. —

' I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds,
More than the infant that is born to-night ;
I thank my God for my humility.'

Other stuff of this sort may be read throughout the whole tragedy, wherein the poet used not much licence in departing from the truth of history, which delivers him a deep dissembler, not of his affections only, but of religion." It was a traditionary blunder, which Warton received and transmitted to his successors, that

* Milton here refers to the first section of the "Eikon Basilike."

Milton reproached Charles with reading Shakspeare, and thus inferred that Shakspeare was no proper closet companion. The passage has wholly the contrary tendency ; and he who thinks otherwise may just as well think that the phrase “ other *stuff* of this sort ” is also used disparagingly.

A few years before — that is in 1645 — Milton had offered another testimony to Shakspeare in his “ L’Allegro,” then published : —

“ Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson’s learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy’s child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.”

Milton was not afraid to publish these lines, even after the suppression of the theatres by his own political party. That he went along with them in their extreme polemical opinions it is impossible to believe ; but he would nevertheless be careful not to mention, in connexion with the stage, names of any doubtful eminence. He was not ashamed to say that the learning of Jonson, the nature of Shakspeare, had for him attractions, though the stage was proscribed. This contrast of the distinguishing qualities of the two men is held to be one amongst the many proofs of Shakspeare’s want of learning ; as if it was not absolutely essential to the whole spirit and conception of the passage that the learning of Jonson, thus pointed out as his leading quality, should be contrasted with the higher quality of Shakspeare — that quality which was assigned him as the

greatest praise by his immediate contemporaries — his nature. No one can doubt of Milton's affection for Shakspeare, and of his courage in avowing that affection, living as he was in the heat of party opinion which was hostile to all such excellence. We have simply "Jonson's learned sock;" but the "native wood-notes wild" of Shakspeare are associated with the most endearing expressions. He is "sweetest Shakespear," he is "Fancy's child." In his later years, after a life of contention and heavy responsibility, Milton still clung to his early delights. The "Theatrum Poetarum," which bears the name of his nephew Edward Phillips, is held to have received many touches from Milton's pen.* At any rate it is natural that it should represent Milton's opinions. It is not alone what is here said of Shakspeare, but of Shakspeare in comparison with the other great dramatic poets of his age, that is important. Take a few examples: —

"BENJAMIN JONSON, the most learned, judicious, and correct, generally so accounted, of our English comedians, and the more to be admired for being so, for that neither the height of natural parts, for he was no Shakespear, nor the cost of extraordinary education, for he is reported but a bricklayer's son, but his own proper industry and addiction to books, advanced him to this perfection: in three of his comedies, namely, 'The

* The "Theatrum Poetarum" was published in 1675, the year after Milton's death.

Fox,' 'Alchymist,' and 'Silent Woman,' he may be compared, in the judgment of learned men, for decorum, language, and well humouring of the parts, as well with the chief of the ancient Greek and Latin comedians as the prime of modern Italians, who have been judged the best of Europe for a happy vein in comedies, nor is his 'Bartholomew Fair' much short of them; as for his other comedies, 'Cynthia's Revels,' 'Poet-aster,' and the rest, let the name of Ben Jonson protect them against whoever shall think fit to be severe in censure against them: the truth is, his tragedies 'Sejanus' and 'Catiline' seem to have in them more of an artificial and inflate than of a pathetical and naturally tragic height."

"CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, a kind of second Shakespear (whose contemporary he was), not only because like him he rose from an actor to be a maker of plays, though inferior both in fame and merit; but also because, in his begun poem of 'Hero and Leander,' he seems to have a resemblance of that clean and unsophisticated wit which is natural to that incomparable poet."

"GEORGE CHAPMAN, a poetical writer, flourishing in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, in that repute both for his translations of 'Homer' and 'Hesiod,' and what he wrote of his own proper genius, that he is thought not the meanest of English poets of that time, and particularly for his dramatic writings."

"JOHN FLETCHER, one of the happy triumvirate

(the other two being Jonson and Shakespear) of the chief dramatic poets of our nation in the last foregoing age, among whom there might be said to be a symmetry of perfection, while each excelled in his peculiar way: Ben Jonson, in his elaborate pains and knowledge of authors; Shakespear, in his pure vein of wit, and natural poesy height; Fletcher, in a courtly elegance and genteel familiarity of style, and withal a wit and invention so overflowing, that the luxuriant branches thereof were frequently thought convenient to be lopped off by his almost incomparable companion Francis Beaumont."

"WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR, the glory of the English stage; whose nativity at Stratford-upon-Avon is the highest honour that town can boast of: from an actor of tragedies and comedies, he became a maker; and such a maker, that, though some others may perhaps pretend to a more exact decorum and economy, especially in tragedy, never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more purely to the life; and where the polishments of art are most wanting, as probably his learning was not extraordinary, he pleaseth with a certain wild and native elegance; and in all his writings hath an unvulgar style, as well in his 'Venus and Adonis,' his 'Rape of Lucrece,' and other various poems, as in his dramatics."

Half a century had elapsed, when these critical opinions were published, from the time when Ben

Jonson had apostrophized Shakspeare as "soul of the age." Whatever qualification we may here find in the praise of Shakspeare, it is unquestionable that the critic sets him above all his contemporaries. Benjamin Jonson was "learned, judicious, and correct," but "he was no Shakespear." Marlowe was "a kind of a second Shakespear;" and his greatest praise is, that "he seems to have a resemblance of that clean and unsophisticated wit which is natural to that incomparable poet." Chapman is "not the meanest" of his time. Fletcher is "one of the happy triumvirate, the other two being Jonson and Shakespear;" but the peculiar excellence of each is discriminated in a way which leaves no doubt as to which the critic meant to hold superior. But there are no measured words applied to the character of Shakspeare. He is "the glory of the English stage"—"never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more purely to the life." We can understand what a pupil of Milton, bred up in his school of severe study and imitation of the ancients, meant, when he says, "Where the polishments of art are most wanting, as probably his learning was not extraordinary, he pleases with a certain wild and native elegance." Here is no accusation that the learning was wholly absent; and that this absence produced the common effects of want of cultivation. Shakspeare, "in all his writings, hath an *unvulgar* style." In the preface to

this valuable little book — which preface is a composition eloquent enough to have been written by Milton himself — there is a passage which is worthy of special observation in connection with what we have already quoted: “If it were once brought to a strict scrutiny, who are the right, genuine, and true-born poets, I fear me our number would fall short, and there are many that have a fame deservedly for what they have writ, even in poetry itself, who if they came to the test, I question how well they would endure to hold open their eagle eyes against the sun: wit, ingenuity, and learning in verse, even elegancy itself, though that comes nearest, are one thing, true native poetry is another; in which there is a certain air and spirit, which perhaps the most learned and judicious in other arts do not perfectly apprehend, much less is it attainable by any study or industry; nay, though all the laws of heroic poem, all the laws of tragedy were exactly observed, yet still this *tour entregent*, this poetic energy, if I may so call it, would be required to give life to all the rest, which shines through the roughest, most unpolished and antiquated language, and may haply be wanting in the most polite and reformed. Let us observe Spenser, with all his rusty obsolete words, with all his rough-hewn clouterly verses; yet take him throughout, and we shall find in him a graceful and poetic majesty: in like manner, Shakespear, in spite of all his unfiled expressions, his rambling

and indigested fancies, the laughter of the critical, yet must be confessed a poet above many that go beyond him in literature some degrees." Taking the whole passage in connection, and looking also at the school of art in which the critic was bred, it is impossible to receive this opinion as regards Shakspeare in any other light than as one of enthusiastic admiration. It is important to note the period in which this admiration was publicly expressed. It was fifteen years after the Restoration of Charles II., when we had a new school of poetry and criticism in England ; when the theatres were in a palmy state as far as regarded courtly and public encouragement. The natural association of these opinions with those of Milton's youth has led us to leap over the interval which elapsed between the close of the Shakspearean drama and the rise of the French school. We desired to show the continuity of opinion in Milton, and in Milton's disciples, that had prevailed for forty years ; during a large portion of which civil war and polemical strife had well nigh banished poetry and the sister arts from England ; and dramatic poetry, especially, was proscribed by a blind fanaticism, wholly and irredeemably, without discrimination between its elevating and its debasing influence upon the public morals. Milton himself had left " a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes." Let us retrace our steps, and glance a little at the prelude to this period.

In 1633 was published the celebrated "Histriomastix, the Player's Scourge," of William Prynne. In the epistle dedicatory to the benchers of Lincoln's Inn, he says, that about seven years before he had set down all the play-condemning passages which he recollected in the Fathers and other authors, and that he had since enlarged the intended bulk of this discourse, "because I saw the number of players, play-books, play-haunters, and play-houses still increasing, there being above forty thousand play-books printed within these two years, as stationers inform me." In his address to the Christian reader he has a distinct allusion to the popularity of Shakspeare's collected works: "Some play-books since I first undertook this subject are grown from quarto into folio, which yet bear so good a price and sale, that I cannot but with grief relate it, they are now new printed in far better paper than most octavo or quarto bibles, which hardly find such vent as they." The two folio editions of Shakspeare are the only play-books grown from quarto to folio to which the zealous puritan can allude, with the exception of Jonson's own edition of his plays, completed in 1631; those of Beaumont and Fletcher were not collected till 1647. The very fact of the publication of the two first folios of Shakspeare is a proof of his popularity with general readers. They were not exclusively the studies of the scholar, such as Milton, or of the play-haunters whom Prynne denounces. A letter in the Bodleian Library, written by a Dr. James,

about this period, testifies how generally they were read: "A young gentle lady of your acquaintance, having read the works of Shakspeare, made me this question," &c.* When the London theatres were provided with novelties in such abundance that, according to Prynne, "one study was scarce able to hold the new play-books," the plays of Shakspeare were still in such demand for the purposes of the stage, that his successors in the theatrical property of the Globe and Blackfriars found it their interest to preserve the monopoly of their performance (which they had so long enjoyed), by a handsome gratuity to the Master of the Revels. There is this entry in the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, in 1627: "Received from Mr. Heming, in their company's name, to forbid the playing of Shakespeare's plays to the Red Bull Company, five pounds." The people clearly had not yet forgotten the "delight and wonder of the stage." Fletcher, Massinger, Shirley, were newer favourites; but the people could not forget Shakspeare. Neither was he forgotten by the great. In the very year of the publication of Prynne's book — when St. James's and Whitehall were brilliant with the splendid revelries of an elegant court, and the queen herself took part in the masques and pageantries, — the indecent allusion to which cost Prynne his ears — the name of Shakspeare was as familiar

* See Mr. Halliwell's "Character of Falstaff," p. 19.

to the royal circle as in the days of James. From the seventeenth of November to the sixth of January, there were eight performances at St. James's and Whitehall, three of which were plays of Shakspeare : namely, Richard III., Taming of the Shrew, and Cymbeline ; and Sir Henry Herbert records of the last, " well liked by the king." * These office accounts have great *lacunæ* ; but, wherever we find them during the reign of Charles, there we find a record of the admiration of Shakspeare.

Dryden lived near enough to the times of Charles I. to be good evidence as to the judgment which the higher circles formed of Shakspeare ; after the Restoration he was intimate with men who had moved in those circles. His " Essay on Dramatic Poesy," which was first printed in 1668, contains the following passage, which has been often cited. Dryden is speaking in his own person, in an imaginary conversation in which the Earl of Dorset bears a part : " To begin, then, with Shakspeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily : when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commenda-

* See Malone's " Historical Account of the English Stage."

tion : he was naturally learned ; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature ; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike ; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him ; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eton say, that there was “no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakspeare ; and, however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson, never equalled them to him in their esteem : and in the last king’s court, when Ben’s reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakspeare far above him.” No testimony can be more positive than this, that the two greatest contemporaries of Shakspeare never equalled him in the public estimation during his own time ; and that in the succeeding period of Charles I., when the reputation of Jonson was at the highest, Suckling, one of the wittiest and

sprightliest of men, and the greater part of the courtiers set Shakspeare far above him. But it was not the gay alone, according to Dryden, who thus revered Shakspeare. He tells us what was the opinion of "Mr. Hales of Eton." John Hales, a Fellow of Eton, is known as the "learned" Hales, and the "ever-memorable" Hales; and of him, Aubrey says, "When the court was at Windsor the learned courtiers much delighted in his company." His opinion of Shakspeare is given with more particularity by Gildon, in an Essay addressed to Dryden in 1694, in which he appeals to Dryden himself as the relator of the anecdote. It is not because Gildon is satirized in "The Dunciad" that his veracity is to be questioned: * — "But to give the world some satisfaction that Shakspeare has had as great veneration paid his excellence by men of unquestioned parts as this I now express for him, I shall give some account of what I have heard from your mouth, Sir, about the noble triumph he gained over all the ancients, by the judgment of the ablest critics of that time. The matter of fact, if my memory fail me not, was this. Mr. Hales of Eton affirmed, that he would show all the poets of antiquity outdone by Shakspeare, in all the topics and common places made use of in poetry. The enemies of Shakspeare would by no means yield him so much excellence; so that it came to a

* See Gifford's "Memoirs of Jonson," p. cclx.

resolution of a trial of skill upon that subject. The place agreed on for the dispute was Mr. Hales's chamber at Eton. A great many books were sent down by the enemies of this poet ; and on the appointed day my Lord Falkland, Sir John Suckling, and all the persons of quality that had wit and learning, and interested themselves in the quarrel, met there ; and upon a thorough disquisition of the point, the judges chosen by agreement out of this learned and ingenious assembly, unanimously gave the preference to Shakspeare, and the Greek and Roman poets were adjudged to veil at least their glory in that to the English hero."

From the death of Shakspeare to the shutting up of the theatres in 1642, a period is embraced of twenty-six years. We have seen the prodigious activity in the production of novelties which existed ten years before the suppression of the theatres. There is too much reason to know that the stage has acquired a more licentious tone after Shakspeare's time ; and although the puritans were over-zealous in their indiscriminating violence against all theatrical performances, there is just cause to believe that the senses of the people were stimulated by excitements of plot and character, mingled with profane and licentious language, much more than in the days when Shakspeare rested for his attractions on a large exhibition of natural passion and true wit ; and when he produced play after play, history, comedy,

tragedy — “works truly excellent and capable of enlarging the understanding, warming and purifying the heart, and placing in the centre of the whole being the germs of noble and manlike actions.”* The nation was much divided then, as it was long afterwards, between the followers of extreme opinions in morals — the over-strict on one hand, the wholly careless on the other. Prynne tells us that, upon his first arrival in London, he had “heard and seen in four several plays, to which the pressing importunity of some ill acquaintance drew me whiles I was yet a novice, such wickedness, such lewdness. as then made my penitent heart to loathe, my conscience to abhor, all stage-plays ever since.” Prynne left Oxford and came to London after 1620. Fletcher was then the living idol of the theatre; and any one who is acquainted with his plays, full of genius as they are, must admit that Prynne had too much cause for his disgust. In the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, in 1633, we find the following curious entry: “The comedy called ‘The Young Admiral,’ being free from oaths, profaneness, or obscenity, hath given me much delight and satisfaction in the reading, and may serve for a pattern to other poets.” The play was Shirley’s. But six months after there is a still more curious entry in the same book: “This morning, being the 9th of January, 1633, [1634]

* Coleridge.

the king was pleased to call me into his withdrawing chamber to the window, where he went over all that I had crossed in Davenant's play-book, and, allowing of *faith* and *slight* to be asseverations only and no oaths, marked them to stand, and some other few things, but in the greater part allowed of my reformatations. This was done upon a complaint of Mr. Endymion Porter's, in December. The king is pleased to take *faith*, *death*, *slight*, for asseverations, and no oaths, to which I do humbly submit as my master's judgment ; but under favour conceive them to be oaths, and enter them here, to declare my opinion and submission." But it was not the striking out of the asseveration, or even of the oaths, which could purify the plays of that period. Their principal demoralizing power consisted in their false representations of human character and actions. Take for example "the frightful contrasts," as they have justly been called, between the women of Beaumont and Fletcher and those of Shakspeare. *He* kept at all times in the high road of life. He "has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice ; he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher, the Kotzebues of the day." * But this very truth and purity of Shakspeare must have greatly diminished his attractions,

* Coleridge's "Literary Remains," vol. ii. p. 79.

amidst a crowd who wrote upon opposite principles. Nothing but the unequalled strength of his artistic power could have preserved the unbroken continuance of his supremacy.

And this leads us to the consideration of another cause why the popular admiration of him would have been diminished and interrupted within a very few years after his death, and certainly long before the suppression of the theatres, if his excellences had not so completely triumphed over every impediment to his enduring popular fame. His plays were to a certain extent mixed up with the reputation of the actors by whom they were originally represented. In that curious play "The Return from Parnassus," which was acted by the students in St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1606, and which was clearly written by an academical person inclined to satirize the popular poets and players of his day, Kempe is thus made to address two scholars who want lessons in the histrionic art: "Be merry, my lads ; you have happened upon the most excellent vocation in the world for money ; they come north and south to bring it to our playhouse ; and for honours, who of more report than Dick Burbage and Will Kempe ? He is not counted a gentleman that knows not Dick Burbage and Will Kempe : there's not a country wench that can dance Sellenger's Round, but can talk of Dick Burbage and Will Kempe." Here we have a testimony to the wide-spread popularity of two

of the original representatives of Shakspeare's clowns and heroes. Kempe died before Shakspeare; Burbage within three years after him. Burbage is almost identified with some of Shakspeare's greatest characters, and especially with Richard III.; and yet the attraction of the great tragic plays died not with Burbage. Before the suppression of the theatres this actor had his immediate successors; and during the eighteen years in which the theatres were closed, the original hits and points of the Richards, and Hamlets, and Macbeths, and Lears, were diligently recorded; and immediately after the Restoration actors again arose, ambitious to realize the mighty conceptions of the great master of the dramatic art. During the period when the theatres were shut, the readers of plays would still be numerous, and they probably would be most found among the younger men who had a vivid recollection of the representations of the successors of Shakspeare. We can understand what the later taste was, by the mode in which Shirley, in his preface to the collated edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, in 1647, speaks of these writers: — "Whom but to mention is to throw a cloud upon all former names, and benight posterity; this book being, without flattery, the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced, and must live, not only the crown and sole reputation of our own, but the stain of all other nations and languages; for it may be

boldly averred, not one indiscretion hath branded this paper in all the lines, this being the authentic wit that made Blackfriars an academy, where the three hours' spectacle, while Beaumont and Fletcher were presented, was usually of more advantage to the hopeful young heir, than a costly, dangerous, foreign travel, with the assistance of a governing monsieur or signor to boot ; and it cannot be denied but that the young spirits of the time, whose birth and quality made them impatient of the sourer ways of education, have from the attentive hearing these pieces, got ground in point of wit and carriage of the most severely employed students, while these recreations were digested into rules, and the very pleasure did edify. How many passable discoursing dining wits stand yet in good credit, upon the bare stock of two or three of these single scenes!" This is a low estimate of the power and capacity of the drama ; and one which is a sufficient evidence of a declining taste amongst those who were perforce contented with reading plays during the silence of the stage. From "the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced," was to be learned what was of more advantage "than a costly, dangerous, foreign travel." Hence were to be acquired "wit and carriage," and "dining wits stand yet in good credit" by passing off the repartees of these dramatists as their own. Shirley knew the character of those whom he addressed in this pre-

face. In the contentions of that tragical age few of the serious thinkers would open a play-book at all. To the gay cavaliers, Beaumont and Fletcher would perhaps be more welcome than Shakspeare ; and Shirley tells us the grounds upon which they were to be admired. But assuredly this is not oblivion of *Shakspeare*.

CHAPTER III.

THE theatres were thrown open at the Restoration. Malone, in his "Historical Account of the English Stage," informs us, that "in the latter end of the year 1659, some months before the restoration of King Charles II., the theatres, which had been suppressed during the usurpation, began to revive, and several plays were performed at the Red Bull in St. John's Street, in that and the following years, before the return of the King." He then adds, that in June, 1660, three companies seem to have been formed, including that of the Red Bull ; and he enters into a history of the contests between the Master of the Revels, and Killigrew and Davenant, who had received a patent from the king for the exclusive performance of dramatic entertainments. It is scarcely necessary for us to pursue the details of this contest, which, as is well known,

terminated in the permanent establishment of two theatres only in London. Malone has ransacked the very irregular series of papers connected with the office of Sir Henry Herbert, who appears to have kept an eye upon theatrical performances with a view to demanding his fees if he should be supported by the higher powers. From these, and other sources, such as the List of Downes, the prompter of the principal plays acted by Killigrew's company, Malone infers, that "such was the lamentable taste of those times that the plays of Fletcher, Jonson, and Shirley were much oftener exhibited than those of Shakspeare." The plays acted by this company, as he collects from these documents, were Henry IV., Merry Wives of Windsor, Othello, and Julius Cæsar. At Davenant's theatre, which boasted of the great actor Betterton, we learn from Malone, that the plays performed were Pericles, Macbeth, The Tempest, Lear, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Henry VIII., Twelfth Night, Taming of the Shrew, Henry V. Malone does not do justice to the value of his own documents, for, when he gives us one list, he points out that there are only three plays of Shakspeare—"a melancholy proof" of his decline; and at another list he shakes his head, reciting "the following plays of Shakspeare, and these *only*." Now it appears to us that, if any proof were wanting of the wonderful hold which Shakspeare had taken of the English mind, under circumstances the most adverse to his con-

tinued popularity, it would be found in these imperfect lists, which do not extend over more than eight or nine years. Here are absolutely fourteen plays of Shakspeare revived—for that is the phrase—in an age which was prolific of its own authors, adapting themselves to a new school of courtly taste. All the indirect testimony, however meagre, exhibits the enduring popularity of Shakspeare. Killigrew's new theatre in Drury Lane is opened with Henry IV. Within a few months after the Restoration, when heading and hanging are going forward, Pepys relates that he went to see Othello. In 1661, he is attracted by Romeo and Juliet; and, in 1662, we have an entry in his diary, with his famous criticism: "To the King's Theatre, where we saw Midsummer's Night's Dream, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." Here, upon unquestionable authority, we have a fifteenth play added to the fourteen previously cited. But why need we search amongst such chance entries for evidence of the reputation of Shakspeare immediately after the Restoration? Those who talk of Shakspeare as *emerging* some century ago into celebrity after having fallen into neglect for a lengthened period; those who flip-pantly affirm, that "the preface of Pope was the first thing that procured general admiration for his works," are singularly ignorant of the commonest passages of literary history. To the

vague and random assertions and assumptions, whether old or new, about the neglect into which Shakspeare had fallen as a popular dramatist, may be opposed the most distinct testimony of one, especially, who was a most accurate and minute chronicler of the public taste. Colley Cibber, who himself became an actor, in 1690, in the one privileged company of London of which Betterton was the head—a company formed out of the united strength of the two companies which had been established at the Restoration—describes the state of the stage at the period of the first revival of dramatic performances: “Besides their being thorough masters of their art, these actors set forward with two critical advantages, which perhaps may never happen again in many ages.” One of the advantages he mentions, but a secondary one, was, “that before the Restoration no actresses had ever been seen upon the English stage.” But the chief advantage was, “their immediate opening after the so long interdiction of plays during the civil war and the anarchy that followed it.” He then goes on to say, “What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had to that high and fresh variety of entertainments!” Provided by whom? By the combined *variety* of Jonson, and Fletcher, and Massinger, and Ford, and Shirley, and a host of other writers, whose attractive fare was to be presented to the eager guests after so long a fast? No. The high entertain-

ment and the fresh variety was to be provided by one man alone,—the man who we are told was neglected in his own age, and forgotten in that which came after him. “What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had to that high and fresh variety of entertainments *which Shakespeare had left prepared for them!* Never was a stage so provided. A hundred years are wasted, and another silent century well advanced*, and yet what unborn age shall say Shakespeare has his equal! How many shining actors have the warm scenes of his genius given to posterity!” Betterton is idolized as an actor, as much as the old man venerates Shakspeare: “Betterton was an actor, as Shakespeare was an author, both without competitors; formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other’s genius. How Shakespeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read, and know; but with what higher rapture would he still be read, could they conceive how Betterton played him!” Whenever Cibber speaks of Betterton’s wondrous excellence, it is always in connection with Shakspeare: “Should I tell you that all the Othellos, Hamlets, Hotspurs, Macbeths, and Brutuses whom you may have seen since his time, have fallen far short of him, this still should give you no idea of his particular excellence.” For some years after the Restoration it seems to have been

* Cibber is writing as late as 1740.

difficult to satiate the people with the repetition of Shakspeare's great characters and leading plays, in company with some of the plays of Jonson and Fletcher. The two companies had an agreement as to their performances : " All the capital plays of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson were divided between them by the approbation of the court, and their own alternate choice. So that when Hart was famous for Othello, Betterton had no less a reputation for Hamlet." Still, the test of histrionic excellence was Shakspeare. So far from Shakspeare being neglected at this period, it is almost evident that the performance of him was overdone ; for every one knows that a theatrical audience, even in the largest city, is, in a considerable degree, composed of regular frequenters of the theatre, and that novelty is therefore an indispensable requisite to continued success. The plays of Shakspeare were better acted by the company of which Betterton was the head, than by the rival company ; and this, according to Cibber, led to the introduction of a new taste:—" These two excellent companies were both prosperous for some few years, till their variety of plays began to be exhausted. Then, of course, the better actors (which the King's seem to have been allowed) could not fail of drawing the greater audiences. Sir William Davenant, therefore, master of the Duke's company, to make head against their success, was forced to add spectacle and music to action ; and

to introduce a new species of plays, since called dramatic operas, of which kind were "The Tempest," "Psyche," "Circe," and others, all set off with the most expensive decorations of scenes and habits, with the best voices and dancers.

"This sensual supply of sight and sound coming into the assistance of the weaker party, it was no wonder they should grow too hard for sense and simple nature, when it is considered how many more people there are that can see and hear than think and judge. So wanton a change of the public taste, therefore, began to fall as heavy upon the King's company as their greater excellence in action had before fallen upon their competitors. Of which encroachment upon wit several good prologues in those days frequently complained."

There can be no doubt that most of the original performances of Shakspeare, immediately after the Restoration, were given from his unsophisticated text. The first improvements that were perpetrated upon this text resulted from the cause which Cibber has so accurately described. Davenant, to make head against the success of the King's company, "was forced to add spectacle and music to action." What importance Davenant attached to these novelties, we may learn from the description of the opening scene of "The Enchanted Island;" that alteration of "The Tempest," by himself and Dryden, to which Cibber refers: — "The front of the stage

is opened, and the band of twenty-four violins, with the harpsicals and theorbos which accompany the voices, are placed between the pit and the stage. While the overture is playing, the curtain rises, and discovers a new frontispiece joined to the great pilasters on each side of the stage. This frontispiece is a noble arch, supported by large wreathed columns of the Corinthian order ; the wreathings of the columns are beautified with roses wound round them, and several Cupids flying about them. On the cornice, just over the capitals, sits on either side a figure, with a trumpet in one hand and a palm in the other, representing Fame. A little farther on the same cornice, on each side of a compass-pediment, lie a lion and a unicorn, the supporters of the royal arms of England. In the middle of the arch are several angels holding the king's arms, as if they were placing them in the midst of that compass-pediment. Behind this is the scene, which represents a thick cloudy sky, a very rocky coast, and a tempestuous sea in perpetual agitation. This tempest (supposed to be raised by magic) has many dreadful objects in it, as several spirits in horrid shapes flying down amongst the sailors, then rising in the air. And when the ship is sinking, the whole house is darkened, and a shower of fire falls upon 'em. This is accompanied with lightning, and several claps of thunder, to the end of the storm."

In the alterations of this play, which were

made in 1669, and which continued to possess the English stage for nearly a century and a half, it is impossible now not to feel how false was the taste upon which they were built. Dryden says of this play, that Davenant, to put the last hand to it, “designed the counterpart to Shakespeare’s plot, namely, that of a man who had never seen a woman; that by this means those two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other.” Nothing can be weaker and falser in art than this mere duplication of an idea. But still it was not done irreverently. The prologue to this altered *Tempest* (of his own part of which Dryden says, “I never writ anything with more delight”) is of itself an answer to the asinine assertion that Dryden, in common with the public of his day, was indifferent to the memory of Shakspeare* :—

“As when a tree’s cut down, the secret root
Lives underground, and thence new branches shoot;
So, from old Shakespear’s honour’d dust, this day
Springs up and buds a new reviving play.
Shakespear, who (taught by none) did first impart
To Fletcher wit, to labouring Jonson art.
He, monarch like, gave those his subjects law,
And is that nature which they paint and draw.

* Lardner’s *Cyclopædia*, &c. We are almost ashamed to quote this trumpery performance; but, absurd as it is, its false assertions are still echoed; and its echoes are heard even amongst those who associate themselves together in honour of Shakspeare.

Fletcher reach'd that which on his heights did grow,
Whilst Jonson crept and gather'd all below.
This did his love, and this his mirth digest:
One imitates him most, the other best.
If they have since out-writ all other men,
'Tis with the drops which fell from Shakespear's pen.
The storm which vanish'd on the neighb'ring shore
Was taught by Shakespear's Tempest first to roar.
That innocence and beauty which did smile
In Fletcher, grew on this Enchanted Isle.
But Shakespear's magic could not copied be,
Within that circle none durst walk but he.
I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now
That liberty to vulgar wits allow,
Which works by magic supernatural things:
But Shakespear's pow'r is sacred as a king's.
Those legends from old priesthood were receiv'd,
And he then writ, as people then believ'd."

Of Dryden's personal admiration of Shakspeare, of his profound veneration for Shakspeare, there is abundant proof. He belonged to the transition period of English poetry. His better judgment was sometimes held in subjection to the false taste that prevailed around him. He attempted to found a school of criticism, which should establish rules of art differing from those which produced the drama of Shakspeare, and yet not acknowledging the supremacy of the tame and formal school of the French tragedians. He did not perfectly understand the real nature of the romantic drama. He did not see that, as in all other high poetry, simplicity was one of its great elements. He was of those who would "gild

refined gold.” But for genial hearty admiration of the great master of the romantic drama no one ever went beyond him. Take, for example, the conclusion of his preface to “All for Love:”—“In my style I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespear; which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme. Not that I condemn my former way, but that this is more proper to my present purpose. I hope I need not to explain myself that I have not copied my author servilely. Words and phrases must of necessity receive a change in succeeding ages. But ’tis almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure; and that he who began dramatic poetry amongst us, untaught by any, and, as Ben Jonson tells us, without learning, should, by the force of his own genius, perform so much, that in a manner he has left no praise for any who came after him.”

Dryden had the notion, in which Shaftesbury followed him, that the style of Shakspeare was obsolete, although we have just seen that he says, “’Tis almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure.” Yet with this notion, which he puts forward as an apology for tampering with Shakspeare, he never ceases to express his admiration of him; and, what is of more importance, to show how general was the same feeling. The preface to *Troilus and Cressida* thus begins:—“The poet *Æschylus* was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after ages, as Shak-

speare is by us.” In this preface is introduced the “Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy,” in which the critic applies a variety of tests to the art of Shakspeare, which only show that he did not understand the principles upon which Shakspeare worked: but still there is everywhere the most unqualified admiration; and in the prologue to the altered play, which, being addressed to the people, could scarcely deal with such rules and exceptions for the formation of a judgment, we have again the most positive testimony to the public sense of Shakspeare. This prologue is “spoken by Mr. Betterton, representing the ghost of Shakspeare.”

“ See, my lov'd Britons, see your Shakespear rise,
An awful ghost confess'd to human eyes!
Unnam'd, methinks, distinguish'd I had been
From other shades, by this eternal green,
Above whose wreaths the vulgar poets strive,
And with a touch their wither'd bays revive.
Untaught, unpractis'd, in a barbarous age,
I found not, but created first, the stage.
And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,
'Twas, that my own abundance gave me more.
On foreign trade I needed not rely,
Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.
In this my rough-drawn play you shall behold
Some master-strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he, who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook; and thought it sacrilege to touch.
Now, where are the successors to my name?
What bring they to fill out a poet's fame?
Weak, short-liv'd issues of a feeble age;
Scarce living to be christen'd on the stage!”

With these repeated acknowledgments of Shakspeare's supremacy it is at first difficult to understand how, in 1665, Dryden should have written "others are now generally preferred before him." The age, as he himself tells us, differed in this respect from that of Shakspeare's own age, and also from that of Charles I. He says, in the same "Essay on Dramatic Poesy," speaking of Beaumont and Fletcher, "Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespear's or Jonson's." But this is not neglect or oblivion of Shakspeare. We learn pretty clearly from Dryden, though he does not care to say so, for that would have been self-condemnation, that a licentiousness which was not found in Shakspeare was an agreeable thing to a licentious audience: "They" (Beaumont and Fletcher) "understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better, whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet before them could paint as they have done. . . . They represented all the passions very lively, but, above all, love." The highest things in Shakspeare can only be fitly appreciated by a people amongst whom there is a high moral tone, capable of understanding and of originating the highest poetical things. With all their faults, the ages of Elizabeth and James possessed this tone; and it is impossible now to estimate how greatly Shakspeare contributed to its preservation.

But nine years after the Restoration there was no public principle in England, and little private honour. The keenest relish for Shakspeare most probably existed out of the Court ; and Betterton, in all likelihood, felt the applause of the pit more truly valuable than that of the king's box. One thing is perfectly clear : that when Dryden is addressing the *people*, he speaks of Shakspeare as *their* especial favourite. He is then "*your* Shakspeare." The crafty and prosaic Pepys, on the contrary, no doubt expressed many a courtier's sentiment about Shakspeare. In the entry of his Diary of August 20th, 1666, we have, "To Deptford by water, reading 'Othello, Moor of Venice,' which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play ; but having so lately read 'The Adventures of Five Hours,' it seems a mean thing." "The Adventures of Five Hours," a tragi-comedy, by Sir Samuel Tuke, was a translation from the Spanish, which Echard commends for its variety of plots and intrigues. We can easily understand how Pepys, and "my wife's maid," counted Othello a mean thing in comparison with it. Pepys shows us pretty clearly the sort of audience that in that day was called fashionable, and the mode in which they displayed their interest in a theatrical entertainment : — "My wife and I to the King's playhouse, and there saw 'The Island Princess,' the first time I ever saw it ; and it is a pretty good play, many good things being in it, and a good scene of a

town on fire. We sat in an upper box, and the jade Nell came and sat in the next box ; a bold, merry slut, who lay laughing there upon people." Again : " To the King's house to ' The Maid's Tragedy ; ' but vexed all the while with two talking ladies and Sir Charles Sedley ; yet pleased to hear their discourse, he being a stranger." We can easily imagine that the " jade Nell," and the " talking ladies," were the representatives of a very large class, who preferred " other plays " to those of Shakspeare.

" The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy," to which we have alluded, contains a more condensed view of Dryden's opinions of Shakspeare than any other of his prefaces. We present it, therefore, with some unimportant omissions, as the summary of the judgment of the highest critical authority of this period,—when the public taste had been corrupted with music and spectacle, and comedies of licentious intrigue abounded, in company with the rhyming tragedies of Dryden himself, and the ranting bombast of his inferior rivals. This essay first appeared in 1679 :—

" Tragedy is thus defined by Aristotle (omitting what I thought unnecessary in his definition) : it is an imitation of one entire, great, and probable action ; not told, but represented ; which, by moving in us fear and pity, is conducive to the purging of those two passions in our minds. More largely thus : Tragedy describes or paints an action, which action must have all the pro-

prieties above named. First, it must be one, or single ; that is, it must not be a history of one man's life — suppose of Alexander the Great, or Julius Cæsar — but one single action of theirs. This condemns all Shakespear's historical plays, which are rather chronicles represented than tragedies ; and all double action of plays. . . . The natural reason of this rule is plain ; for two different independent actions distract the attention and concernment of the audience, and, consequently, destroy the intention of the poet. If his business be to move terror and pity, and one of his actions be comical, the other tragical, the former will divert the people, and utterly make void his greater purpose. Therefore, as in perspective, so in tragedy, there must be a point of sight in which all the lines terminate ; otherwise, the eye wanders, and the work is false. . . .

“ As the action ought to be one, it ought, as such, to have order in it ; that is, to have a natural beginning, a middle, and an end. A natural beginning, says Aristotle, is that which could not necessarily have been placed after another thing ; and so of the rest. This consideration will arraign all plays after the new model of Spanish plots, where accident is heaped upon accident, and that which is first, might as reasonably be last ; an inconvenience not to be remedied but by making one accident naturally produce another, otherwise it is a farce, and not a play. . . .

“ The following properties of the action are so

easy that they need not my explaining. It ought to be great, and to consist of great persons, to distinguish it from comedy, where the action is trivial, and the persons of inferior rank. The last quality of the action is, that it ought to be probable, as well as admirable and great. It is not necessary that there should be historical truth in it ; but always necessary that there should be a likeness of truth, something that is more than barely possible, probable being that which succeeds or happens oftener than it misses. To invent, therefore, a probability, and to make it wonderful, is the most difficult undertaking in the art of poetry : for that which is not wonderful is not great, and that which is not probable will not delight a reasonable audience. This action, thus described, must be represented, and not told, to distinguish dramatic poetry from epic. But I hasten to the end, or scope, of tragedy, which is to rectify or purge our passions, fear and pity.

“ To instruct delightfully is the general end of all poetry ; philosophy instructs, but it performs its work by precept, which is not delightful, or not so delightful as example. To purge the passions by example is therefore the particular instruction which belongs to tragedy. Rapin, a judicious critic, has observed, from Aristotle, that pride and want of commiseration are the most predominant vices in mankind : therefore, to cure us of these two, the inventors

of tragedy have chosen to work upon two other passions, which are fear and pity. We are wrought to fear by their setting before our eyes some terrible example of misfortune which happened to persons of the highest quality ; for such an action demonstrates to us that no condition is privileged from the turns of fortune : this must of necessity cause terror in us, and consequently abate our pride. But when we see that the most virtuous, as well as the greatest, are not exempt from such misfortunes, that consideration moves pity in us, and insensibly works us to be helpful to, and tender over, the distressed, which is the noblest and most godlike of moral virtues. Here it is observable that it is absolutely necessary to make a man virtuous, if we desire he should be pitied. We lament not, but detest, a wicked man : we are glad when we behold his crimes are punished, and that poetical justice is done upon him. Euripides was censured by the critics of his time for making his chief characters too wicked : for example, Phædra, though she loved her son-in-law with reluctancy, and that it was a curse upon her family for offending Venus, yet was thought too ill a pattern for the stage. Shall we therefore banish all characters of villany ? I confess I am not of that opinion : but it is necessary that the hero of the play be not a villain ; that is, the characters which should move our pity ought to have virtuous inclinations and degrees of moral goodness in them. As for a

perfect character of virtue, it never was in nature, and therefore, there can be no imitation of it: but there are allays of frailty to be allowed for the chief persons, yet so that the good which is in them shall outweigh the bad, and consequently leave room for punishment on the one side, and pity on the other.

“ After all, if any one will ask me whether a tragedy cannot be made upon any other grounds than those of exciting pity and terror in us, Bossu, the best of modern critics, answers thus, in general: ‘That all excellent arts, and particularly that of poetry, have been invented and brought to perfection by men of a transcendent genius; and that therefore they who practise afterwards the same arts are obliged to tread in their footsteps, and to search in their writings the foundation of them; for it is not just that new rules should destroy the authority of the old.’

“ Here therefore the general answer may be given to the first question, how far we ought to imitate Shakespear and Fletcher in their plots; namely, that we ought to follow them so far only as they have copied the excellences of those who invented and brought to perfection dramatic poetry; those things only excepted which religion, customs of countries, idioms of languages, &c., have altered in the superstructures, but not in the foundation of the design.

“ How defective Shakespear and Fletcher have

been in all their plots, Mr. Rymer has discovered in his ' Criticisms : ' neither can we, who follow them, be excused from the same or greater errors ; which are the more unpardonable in us, because we want their beauty to countervail our faults.

“ The difference between Shakespear and Fletcher in their plotting, seems to be this—that Shakespear generally moves more terror, and Fletcher more compassion. For the first had a more masculine, a bolder, and more fiery genius ; the second, a more soft and womanish. In the mechanic beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three unities — time, place, and action—they are both deficient ; but Shakespear most. Ben Jonson reformed those errors in his comedies, yet one of Shakespear's was regular before him ; which is, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

“ After the plot, which is the foundation of the play, the next thing to which we ought to apply our judgment is the manners ; for now the poet comes to work aboveground. The groundwork indeed is that which is most necessary, as that upon which depends the firmness of the whole fabric ; yet it strikes not the eye so much as the beauties or imperfections of the manners, the thoughts, and the expressions.

“ The first rule which Bossu prescribes to the writer of an heroic poem, and which holds, too, by the same reason in all dramatic poetry, is to

make the moral of the work ; that is, to lay down to yourself what the precept of morality shall be which you would insinuate into the people : as, namely, Homer's (which I have copied in my 'Conquest of Granada') was, that union preserves a commonwealth, and discord destroys it ; Sophocles, in his 'Ædipus,' that no man is to be accounted happy before his death. It is the moral that directs the whole action of the play to one centre, and that action or fable is the example built upon the moral, which confirms the truth of it to our experience. When the fable is designed, then, and not before, the persons are to be introduced, with their manners, characters, and passions.

“ The manners in a poem are understood to be those inclinations, whether natural or acquired, which move and carry us to actions, good, bad, or indifferent, in a play ; or which incline the persons to such or such actions.

“ But as the manners are useful in this art, they may be all comprised under these general heads : First, they must be apparent ; that is, in every character of the play some inclinations of the person must appear ; and these are shown in the actions and discourse. Secondly, the manners must be suitable or agreeing to the persons ; that is, to the age, sex, dignity, and the other general heads of manners. Thus, when a poet has given the dignity of a king to one of his persons, in all his actions and speeches, that

person must discover majesty, magnanimity, and jealousy of power ; because these are suitable to the general manners of a king. The third property of manners is resemblance ; and this is founded upon the particular characters of men, as we have them delivered to us by relation or history ; that is, when a poet has the known character of this or that man before him, he is bound to represent him such, at least not contrary to that which fame has reported him to have been.

“ The last property of manners is, that they be constant and equal ; that is, maintained the same through the whole design.

“ From the manners the characters of persons are derived ; for indeed the characters are no other than the inclinations, as they appear in the several persons of the poem : a character being thus defined — that which distinguishes one man from another. Not to repeat the same things over again which have been said of the manners, I will only add what is necessary here. A character, or that which distinguishes one man from all others, cannot be supposed to consist of one particular virtue, or vice, or passion only ; but it is a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person. Thus, the same man may be liberal and valiant, but not liberal and covetous ; so in a comical character, or humour, (which is an inclination to this or that particular folly,) Falstaff is a

liar and a coward, a glutton and a buffoon, because all these qualities may agree in the same man ; yet it is still to be observed that one virtue, vice, and passion, ought to be shown in every man, as predominant over all the rest ; as covetousness in Crassus, love of his country in Brutus ; and the same in characters which are feigned.

“ The chief character or hero in a tragedy, as I have already shown, ought in prudence to be such a man, who has so much more in him of virtue than of vice, that he may be left amiable to the audience, which otherwise cannot have any concernment for his sufferings ; and it is on this one character that the pity and terror must be principally, if not wholly, founded ; a rule which is extremely necessary, and which none of the critics that I know have fully enough discovered to us ; for terror and compassion work but weakly when they are divided into many persons. . . .

“ By what has been said of the manners, it will be easy for a reasonable man to judge whether the characters be truly or falsely drawn in a tragedy ; for if there be no manners appearing in the characters, no concernment for the persons can be raised ; no pity or horror can be moved but by vice or virtue, therefore without them no person can have business in the play. If the inclinations be obscure, it is a sign the poet is in the dark, and knows not what manner of man

he presents to you, and consequently you can have no idea, or very imperfect, of that man; nor can judge what resolutions he ought to take, or what words or actions are proper for him. Most comedies made up of accidents or adventures are liable to fall into this error; and tragedies with many turns are subject to it; for the manners never can be evident where the surprises of fortune take up all the business of the stage, and where the poet is more in pain to tell you what happened to such a man than what he was. It is one of the excellences of Shakespear, that the manners of his persons are generally apparent, and you see their bent and inclinations. Fletcher comes far short of him in this, as indeed he does almost in everything. There are but glimmerings of manners in most of his comedies, which run upon adventures; and in his tragedies, 'Rollo,' 'Otto,' the 'King and no King,' 'Melantius,' and many others of his best, are but pictures shown you in the twilight; you know not whether they resemble vice or virtue, and they are either good, bad, or indifferent, as the present scene requires it. But of all poets this commendation is to be given to Ben Jonson, that the manners even of the most inconsiderable persons in his plays are everywhere apparent.

“By considering the second quality of manners, which is, that they be suitable to the age, quality, country, dignity, &c., of the character, we may likewise judge whether a poet has fol-

lowed nature. In this kind Sophocles and Euripides have more excelled among the Greeks than Æschylus ; and Terence more than Plautus among the Romans. . . . The present French poets are generally accused, that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatsoever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine's Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio. But our Shakespear, having ascribed to Henry the Fourth the character of a king and of a father, gives him the perfect manners of each relation, when either he transacts with his son or with his subjects. Fletcher, on the other side, gives neither to Arbaces, nor to his king in 'The Maid's Tragedy,' the qualities which are suitable to a monarch. . . . To return once more to Shakespear : no man ever drew so many characters, or generally distinguished them better from one another, excepting only Jonson. I will instance but in one, to show the copiousness of his invention ; it is that of Caliban, or the monster, in 'The Tempest.' He seems there to have created a person which was not in nature—a boldness which at first sight would appear intolerable ; for he makes him a species of himself, begotten by an incubus on a witch ; but this, as I have elsewhere proved, is not wholly beyond the bounds of credibility,—at least the vulgar still believe it. We have the separated notions of a spirit and of a witch—(and spirits,

according to Plato, are vested with a subtle body ; according to some of his followers, have different sexes) ; — therefore, as from the distinct apprehensions of a horse and of a man, imagination has formed a Centaur, so from those of an incubus and a sorceress Shakespear has produced his monster. Whether or no his generation can be defended I leave to philosophy ; but of this I am certain, that the poet has most judiciously furnished him with a person, a language, and a character which will suit him, both by father's and mother's side : he has all the discontents and malice of a witch and of a devil, besides a convenient proportion of the deadly sins —gluttony, sloth, and lust are manifest ; the dejectedness of a slave is likewise given him, and the ignorance of one bred up in a desert island. His person is monstrous, as he is the product of unnatural lust ; and his language is as hobgoblin as his person : in all things he is distinguished from other mortals. The characters of Fletcher are poor and narrow in comparison of Shakespear's : I remember not one which is not borrowed from him, unless you will except that strange mixture of a man in the ' King and no King.' So that in this part Shakespear is generally worth our imitation ; and to imitate Fletcher is but to copy after him who was a copier.

“ Under this general head of manners, the passions are naturally included as belonging to the characters. I speak not of pity and of terror,

which are to be moved in the audience by the plot, but of anger, hatred, love, ambition, jealousy, revenge, &c., as they are shown in this or that person of the play. To describe these naturally, and to move them artfully, is one of the greatest commendations which can be given to a poet. To write pathetically, says Longinus, cannot proceed but from a lofty genius. A poet must be born with this quality ; yet, unless he help himself by an acquired knowledge of the passions, what they are in their own nature, and by what springs they are to be moved, he will be subject either to raise them where they ought not to be raised, or not to raise them by the just degrees of nature, or to amplify them beyond the natural bounds, or not to observe the crisis and turns of them in their cooling and decay : all which errors proceed from want of judgment in the poet, and from being unskilled in the principles of moral philosophy.

“ It is necessary therefore for a poet, who would concern an audience by describing of a passion, first to prepare it, and not to rush upon it all at once.

“ The next necessary rule is, to put nothing into the discourse which may hinder your moving of the passions. Too many accidents, as I have said, encumber the poet as much as the arms of Saul did David ; for the variety of passions which they produce are ever crossing and justling each other out of the way. He who treats of joy

and grief together is in a fair way of causing neither of those effects. There is yet another obstacle to be removed, which is pointed wit, and sentences affected out of season; these are nothing of kin to the violence of passion. No man is at leisure to make sentences and similes when his soul is in agony.

“If Shakespear be allowed, as I think he must, to have made his characters distinct, it will easily be inferred that he understood the nature of the passions; because it has been proved already that confused passions make undistinguishable characters. Yet I cannot deny that he has his failings; but they are not so much in the passions themselves as in his manner of expression: he often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible. I will not say of so great a poet, that he distinguished not the blown puffy style from true sublimity, but I may venture to maintain that the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment, either in coining of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use into the violence of a catachresis. It is not that I would explode the use of metaphors from passion, for Longinus thinks them necessary to raise it; but to use them at every word,—to say nothing without a metaphor, a simile, an image, or description,—is, I doubt, to smell a little too strongly of the buskin. I must be forced to

give an example of expressing passion figuratively ; but that I may do it with respect to Shakespear, it shall not be taken from anything of his ; it is an exclamation against fortune, quoted in his Hamlet, but written by some other poet : —

‘ Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune ! all you gods,
In general synod, take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends.’

And immediately after, speaking of Hecuba, when Priam was killed before her eyes : —

‘ The mobbled queen,’ &c.

“ What a pudder is here kept in raising the expression of trifling thoughts ! Would not a man have thought that the poet had been bound prentice to a wheelwright for his first rant ? and had followed a ragman for the clout and blanket in the second ? But Shakespear does not often thus ; for the passions in his scene between Brutus and Cassius are extremely natural, the thoughts are such as arise from the matter, and the expression of them not viciously figurative. I cannot leave this subject before I do justice to that divine poet, by giving you one of his passionate descriptions : it is of Richard the Second, when he was deposed and led in triumph through the streets of London by Henry Bul-lingbrook. The painting of it is so lively and

the words so moving, that I have scarce read anything comparable to it in any other language, Suppose you have seen already the fortunate usurper passing through the crowd, and followed by the shouts and acclamations of the people; and now behold King Richard entering upon the scene. Consider the wretchedness of his condition, and his carriage in it, and refrain from pity if you can:—

‘As in a theatre, the eyes of men,’ &c.

“To speak justly of this whole matter, it is neither height of thought that is discommended, nor pathetic vehemence, nor any nobleness of expression in its proper place; but it is a false measure of all these, something which is like them and is not them: it is the Bristol stone which appears like a diamond; it is an extravagant thought instead of a sublime one; it is roaring madness instead of vehemence; and a sound of words instead of sense. If Shakespear were stripped of all the bombast in his passions, and drest in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver at the bottom of the melting-pot. But I fear (at least let me fear it for myself) that we who ape his sounding words have nothing of his thought, but are all outside; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giant’s clothes. Therefore let not Shakespear

suffer for our sakes ; it is our fault who succeed him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection.

“ For what remains, the excellency of that poet was, as I have said, in the more manly passions ; Fletcher’s in the softer : Shakespear writ better betwixt man and man, Fletcher betwixt man and women ; consequently the one described friendship better, the other love ; yet Shakespear taught Fletcher to write love ; and Juliet and Desdemona are originals. It is true the scholar had the softer soul, but the master had the kinder. Friendship is both a virtue and a passion essentially : love is a passion only in its nature, and is not a virtue but by accident. Good nature makes friendship, but effeminacy love. Shakespear had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions ; Fletcher a more confined and limited : for though he treated love in perfection, yet honour, ambition, revenge, and generally all the stronger passions, he either touched not or not masterly. To conclude all, he was a limb of Shakespear.”

“ The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy ” is held by Dr. Johnson to be an answer to “ The Tragedies of the last Age considered and examined,” by the celebrated Thomas Rymer. Rymer’s book was originally published in 1678 ; and Dryden’s Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, in which the supposed answer is contained, appeared in the following year. Rymer is ge-

nerally known as the learned editor of the vast collection of national documents, arranged and published by him in his official capacity of Historiographer Royal, under the name of "Fœdera." But this publication was not commenced till 1703, and for many years previous he had been a miscellaneous writer in polite literature. In 1678, he produced a tragedy entitled "Edgar." It is almost painful to consider that an author to whose gigantic labours all students of English history are so deeply indebted should have put forth the most ludicrous criticisms upon Shakspeare that exist in the English language. In "The Tragedies considered," he proposes to examine "the choicest and most applauded English tragedies of this last age ; as 'Rollo,' 'A King and no King.' 'The Maid's Tragedy,' by Beaumont and Fletcher ; 'Othello,' and 'Julius Cæsar,' by Shakespear ; and 'Catiline,' by worthy Ben." But at this period he did not carry through his design. The whole of this book is devoted to the three plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. It would be beside our purpose to show how he disposes of them ; but the following passage will exhibit the nature of his judgment : — "I have thought our poetry of the last age as rude as our architecture. One cause thereof might be, that Aristotle's 'Treatise of Poetry' has been so little studied amongst us." The completion of Rymer's plan was deferred for fifteen years. In 1693, appeared "A Short View

of Tragedy ; its original Excellency and Corruption. With some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage." This second treatise thus begins : " What reformation may not we expect now that in France they see the necessity for a chorus to their tragedies ! The chorus was the root and original, and is certainly almost the most necessary part, of tragedy." It would be exceedingly unjust to Rymer to collect the *disjecta membra* of his criticism upon, or rather abuse of, Shakspeare, without exhibiting what were his own notions of dramatic excellence ; and certainly in the whole range of the ludicrous there are few things more amusing than his solemn scheme for a tragedy on the subject of the Spanish Armada, in imitation of " The Persians," of Æschylus. We cannot resist the temptation of presenting it to our readers : —

" The place, then, for the action may be at Madrid, by some tomb, or solemn place of resort ; or, if we prefer a turn in it from good to bad fortune, then some drawing room in the palace near the king's bed chamber.

" The time to begin, twelve at night.

" The scene opening presents fifteen grandees of Spain, with their most solemn beards and accoutrements, met there (suppose) after some ball, or other public occasion. They talk of the state of affairs, the greatness of their power, the vastness of their dominions, and prospect to be

infallibly, ere long, lords of all. With this prosperity and goodly thoughts transported, they at last form themselves into the chorus, and walk such measures, with music, as may become the gravity of such a chorus.

“Then enter two or three of the cabinet council, who now have leave to tell the secret that the preparations and the invincible Armada was to conquer England. These, with part of the chorus, may communicate all the particulars—the provisions, and the strength by sea and land; the certainty of success, the advantages by that accession; and the many tun of tar-barrels for the heretics. These topics may afford matter enough, with the chorus, for the second act.

“In the third act, these gentlemen of the cabinet cannot agree about sharing the preferments of England, and a mighty broil there is amongst them. One will not be content unless he is King of Man; another will be Duke of Lancaster. One, that had seen a coronation in England, will by all means be Duke of Aquitaine, or else Duke of Normandy. And on this occasion two competitors have a juster occasion to work up and show the muscles of their passion than Shakespear’s Cassius and Brutus. After, the chorus.

“The fourth act may, instead of Atossa, present some old dames of the court, used to dream dreams, and to see sprites, in their night-rails

and forehead-cloths, to alarm our gentlemen with new apprehensions, which make distraction and disorders sufficient to furnish out this act.

“ In the last act the king enters, and wisely discourses against dreams and hobgoblins, to quiet their minds : and, the more to satisfy them, and take off their fright, he lets them to know that St. Loyola had appeared to him, and assured him that all is well. This said, comes a messenger of the ill news ; his account is lame, suspected, he sent to prison. A second messenger, that came away long after, but had a speedier passage : his account is distinct, and all their loss credited. So, in fine, one of the chorus concludes with that of Euripides, Thus you see the gods bring things to pass often otherwise than was by man proposed.”

After this, can we wonder that the art of Thomas Rymer is opposed to the art of William Shakspeare ? Let us hear what he says of Othello — “ of all the tragedies acted on our English stage, that which is said to bear the bell away.” He first gives the fable, of which the points are, the marriage of Othello, the jealousy from the incident of the handkerchief, and the murder of Desdemona. The facetious critic then proceeds : —

“ Whatever rubs or difficulty may stick on the bark, the moral, sure, of this fable is very instructive.

“ First, This may be a caution to all maidens

of quality how, without their parents' consent, they run away with blackamoors.

“ Secondly, This may be a warning to all good wives, that they look well to their linen.

“ Thirdly, This may be a lesson to husbands, that, before their jealousy be tragical, the proofs may be mathematical.”

The whole story of Othello, we learn, is founded upon “ an improbable lie : ” —

“ The character of that state (Venice) is to employ strangers in their wars ; but shall a poet thence fancy that they will set a negro to be their general, or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk ? With us, a blackamoor might rise to be a trumpeter ; but Shakespear would not have him less than a lieutenant-general. With us, a Moor might marry some little drab, or small-coal wench : Shakespear would provide him the daughter and heir of some great lord or privy-councillor ; and all the town should reckon it a very suitable match : yet the English are not bred up with that hatred and aversion to the Moors as are the Venetians, who suffer by a perpetual hostility from them, —

Littora littoribus contraria . . .

Nothing is more odious in nature than an improbable lie ; and, certainly, never was any play fraught, like this of Othello, with improbabilities.”

We next are told, that “ the characters of

manners, which are the second part in a tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper than the fable was improbable and absurd." From such characters we are not to expect thoughts "that are either true, or fine, or noble;" and further, "in the neighing of a horse, or in the growling of a mastiff, there is a meaning, there is as lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity, than many times in the tragical flights of Shakspeare." The crowning glory of the treatise is the mode in which the critic disposes of the scene between Othello and Iago in the third act: —

"Then comes the wonderful scene where Iago, by shrugs, half-words, and ambiguous reflections, works Othello up to be jealous. One might think, after what we have seen, that there needs no great cunning, no great poetry and address, to make the Moor jealous. Such impatience, such a rout for a handsome young fellow, the very morning after her marriage, must make him either to be jealous, or to take her for a changeling below his jealousy. After this scene it might strain the poet's skill to reconcile the couple, and allay the jealousy. Iago now can only *actum agere*, and vex the audience with a nauseous repetition. Whence comes it, then, that this is the top scene—the scene that raises Othello above all other tragedies in our theatres? It is purely from the action, from the mops and the mows, the grimace, the grins and gesticula-

tion. Such scenes as this have made all the world run after Harlequin and Scaramuccio."

The conclusion of this prodigious piece of criticism must conclude our extracts from Thomas Rymer : —

"What can remain with the audience to carry home with them from this sort of poetry, for their use and edification? How can it work unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, tintamarre, and jingle-jangle beyond what all the parish-clerks of London, with their Old Testament farces and interludes, in Richard the Second's time, could ever pretend to? Our only hopes, for the good of their souls, can be, that these people go to the playhouse as they do to church, to sit still, look on one another, make no reflection, nor mind the play more than they would a sermon. There is in this play some burlesque, some humour and ramble of comical wit, some show, and some mimicry to divert the spectators : but the tragical part is plainly none other than a bloody farce, without salt or savour."

We cannot agree with the author of an able article in "The Retrospective Review," that "these attacks on Shakespear are very curious, as evincing how gradual has been the increase of his fame;" that "their whole tone shows that

the author was not advancing what he thought the world would regard as paradoxical or strange ;" that " he speaks as one with authority to decide." So far from receiving Rymer's frenzied denunciations as an expression of public opinion, we regard them as the idiosyncrasies of a very singular individual, who is furious in the exact proportion that the public opinion differs from his own. He attacks Othello and Julius Cæsar, especially, because Betterton had for years been drawing crowds to his performance in those tragedies. He is one of those who glory in opposing the general opinion. In his first book, he says, " With the remaining tragedies I shall also send you some reflections on that ' Paradise Lost ' of Milton's, which some are pleased to call a poem." Dryden, the great critical authority of his day, before whose opinions all other men bowed, had in 1679 thus spoken of the origin of his great scene between Troilus and Hector : " The occasion of raising it was hinted to me by Mr. Betterton ; the contrivance and working of it was my own. They who think to do me an injury by saying that it is an imitation of the scene betwixt Brutus and Cassius, do me an honour by supposing I could imitate the incomparable Shakespear." Dryden then goes on to contrast the modes in which Euripides, Fletcher, and Shakspeare have managed the quarrel of two virtuous men, raised to the extremity of passion, and ending in the renewal of their

friendship ; and he says, “ The particular groundwork which Shakespear has taken is incomparably the best.” This decision of Dryden would in those days dispose of the matter as a question of criticism. But out comes Rymer, who, in opposition to Dryden’s judgment, and Betterton’s applause, tells us, that Brutus and Cassius here act the part of mimics ; are bullies and buffoons ; are to exhibit “ a trial of skill in huffing and swaggering, like two drunken Hectors for a two-penny reckoning.” It may be true that “ the author was not advancing what *he thought* the world would regard as paradoxical and strange ;” for it is the commonest of self-delusions, even to the delusions of insanity, to believe that the whole world agrees with the most extravagant mistakes and the strangest paradoxes ; and when Rymer, upon his critical throne, “ speaks as one with authority to decide,” his authority is as powerless as that of the madman in Hogarth, who sits in solitary nakedness upon his straw, with crown on head and sceptre in hand. Rymer is a remarkable example of an able man, in his own province, meddling with that of which he has not the slightest true conception. He is, perhaps, more denuded of the poetical sense than any man who ever attempted to be a critic in poetry : but he had real learning. Shakspeare fell into worse hands after Rymer. The “ Man Mountain ” was fastened to the ground by the Lilliputians, and the strings are only just now broken by which he was bound.

In the quotations which we have given from Dryden, it may be seen how reverently criticism was based upon certain laws which, however false might be their application, were nevertheless held to be tests of the merit of the highest poetical productions. Dryden was always balancing between the rigid application of these laws, and his own hearty admiration of those whose art had rejected them. If he had been less of a real poet himself, he might have become as furious a stickler for the canons of the ancients as Rymer was. With all his occasional expressions of hatred towards the French school of tragedy, he was unconsciously walking in the circle which the fashion of his age had drawn around all poetical invention. It was assuredly not yet the fashion of the people; for they clung to the school of poetry and passion with a love which no critical opinions could wholly subdue. It was not the fashion of those who had drunk their inspiration from the Elizabethan poets. It was not the fashion of Milton and his disciples. Hear how Edward Phillips speaks of Corneille in 1675:—"Corneille, the great dramatic writer of France, wonderfully applauded by the present age, both among his own countrymen and our Frenchly-affected English, for the amorous intrigues which, if not there before, he commonly thrusts into his tragedies and acted histories; the imitation whereof among us, and of the perpetual colloquy in rhyme, hath of late very much

corrupted our English stage." It was the spread of this fashion amongst the courtly *littérateurs* of the day that gave some encouragement to the extravagance of Rymer. The solemn harangues about decorum in tragedy, the unities, moral fitness, did not always present the ludicrous side, as it did in this learned madman, who sublimated the whole affair into the most delicious absurdity. We love him for it. His application of a "rule" to Fletcher's "Maid's Tragedy" is altogether such a beautiful exemplification of his mode of applying his critical knowledge, that we cannot forbear one more quotation from him:—"If I mistake not, in poetry, no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him; nor is a servant to kill the master, nor a private man, much less a subject, to kill a king; nor on the contrary. Poetical decency will not suffer death to be dealt to each other by such persons whom the laws of duel allow not to enter the lists together." Rymer never changed his opinions. The principles upon which he founded his first book were carried to a greater height of extravagance in his second. Dryden, on the contrary, depreciates Shakspeare, though timidly and doubtfully, in his early criticisms, but warms into higher and higher admiration as he grows older. The "Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Grenada," written in 1672, presents a curious contrast to "The Grounds of Criticism." He was

then a young poet, and wanted to thrust aside those who stood in the way of his stage popularity: "Let any man who understands English read diligently the works of Shakespear and Fletcher; and I dare undertake that he will find in every page some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense: and yet these men are revered when we are not forgiven. . . .

. . . But the times were ignorant in which they lived. Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity; witness the lameness of their plots." This was the self-complacency which the maturer thoughts of a vigorous mind corrected. But nothing could correct the critical obstinacy of Rymer. Dryden's poetical soul mounted above the growing feebleness of his age's criticism, till at last, when he attempted to deal with Shakspeare in the spirit of his age, he became a worshipper instead of a mocker: —

"And those who came to scoff remain'd to pray."

The age laid its leaden sceptre upon the smaller minds, and especially upon those who approached Shakspeare with a cold and creeping admiration. Of such was Charles Gildon. In 1694 he appeared in the world with "Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, and an Attempt at a Vindication of Shakespear." It would be a waste of time to produce the antagonist of Rymer armed *cap-à-pié*, and

set these two doughty combatants in mortal fight with their sacks of sand. It will be sufficient for us to quote a few passages from Gildon's "Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage," 1710, by way of showing, what indeed may be inferred from Rymer's own book, that the people were against the critics: — "'Tis my opinion that, if Shakespear had had those advantages of learning which the perfect knowledge of the ancients would have given him, so great a genius as his would have made him a very dangerous rival in fame to the greatest poets of antiquity; so far am I from seeing how this knowledge could either have curbed, confined, or spoiled the natural excellence of his writings. For though I must always think our author a miracle for the age he lived in, yet I am obliged, in justice to reason and art, to confess that he does not come up to the ancients in all the beauties of the drama. But it is no small honour to him, that he has surpassed them in the topics or commonplaces. And to confirm the victory he obtained on that head at Mr. Hales's chamber, at Eton, I shall, in this present undertaking, not only transcribe the most shining, but refer the reader to the same subjects in the Latin authors. This I do that I might omit nothing that could do his memory that justice which he really deserves: but to put his errors and his excellences on the same bottom is to injure the latter, and give the enemies of our poet an

advantage against him, of doing the same ; that is, of rejecting his beauties, as all of a piece with his faults. This unaccountable bigotry of the town to the very errors of Shakespear was the occasion of Mr. Rymer's criticisms, and drove him as far into the contrary extreme. I am far from approving his manner of treating our poet ; though Mr. Dryden owns, that all, or most, of the faults he has found are just ; but adds this odd reflection : And yet, says he, who minds the critic, and who admires Shakespear less ? That was as much as to say, Mr. Rymer has indeed made good his charge, and yet the town admired his errors still : which I take to be a greater proof of the folly and abandoned taste of the town than of any imperfections in the critic ; which, in my opinion, exposed the ignorance of the age he lived in ; to which Mr. Rowe very justly ascribes most of his faults. It must be owned that Mr. Rymer carried the matter too far, since no man that has the least relish of poetry can question his genius ; for, in spite of his known and visible errors, when I read Shakespear, even in some of his most irregular plays, I am surprised into a pleasure so great, that my judgment is no longer free to see the faults, though they are never so gross and evident. There is such a witchery in him that all the rules of art which he does not observe, though built on an equally solid and infallible reason, vanish away in the transports of those

that he does observe, so entirely as if I had never known anything of the matter." The rules of art ! It was the extraordinary folly of the age which produced these observations to believe that Shakspeare realized his great endeavours without any rule at all, that is, without any method. Rymer was such a thorough believer in the infallibility of these rules of art, that he shut his eyes to the very highest power of Shakspeare, because it did not agree with these rules. Gildon believed in the power, and believed in the rules at the same time : hence his contradictions. " The unaccountable bigotry of the town to the very errors of Shakespear " was the best proof of the triumphant privilege of genius to abide in full power and tranquillity amidst its own rules. The small poets, and the smaller critics, were working upon mechanic rules. When they saw in Shakspeare something like an adherence to ancient rules of art, they cried out, Wonderful power of nature ! When they detected a deviation, they exclaimed, Pitiab!e calamity of ignorance ! It is evident that these critics could not subject the people to their laws ; and they despise the ignorant people, therefore, as they pity the ignorant Shakspeare. Hear Gildon again : — " A judicious reader of our author will easily discover those defects that his beauties would make him wish had been corrected by a knowledge of the whole art of the drama. For it is evident that, by the force of his own judgment, or the strength of

his imagination, he has followed the rules of art in all those particulars in which he pleases. I know that the rules of art have been sufficiently clamoured against by an ignorant and thoughtless sort of men of our age ; but it was because they knew nothing of them, and never considered that without some standard of excellence there could be no justice done to merit, to which poetasters and poets must else have an equal claim, which is the highest degree of barbarism. Nay, without an appeal to these very rules, Shakespear himself is not to be distinguished from the most worthless pretenders, who have often met with an undeserved applause, and challenge the title of great poets from their success." We will only anticipate for a moment the philosophical wisdom of a later school of criticism, to supply an answer to Gildon : "The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It must embody in order to reveal itself ; but a living body is of necessity an organized one ; and what is organization but the connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means ? " *

The redoubted John Dennis was another of the antagonists of Rymer. He carried heavier metal than Gildon ; but he nevertheless belonged to the cuckoo school of "rules of art." He had a just appreciation of Shakspeare as far as he

* Coleridge.

went; and a few of his judgments certainly deserve a place in this History of Opinion: — “Shakespear was one of the greatest geniuses that the world ever saw for the tragic stage. Though he lay under greater disadvantages than any of his successors, yet had he greater and more genuine beauties than the best and greatest of them. And what makes the brightest glory of his character, those beauties were entirely his own, and owing to the force of his own nature; whereas his faults were owing to his education, and to the age that he lived in. One may say of him as they did of Homer — that he had none to imitate, and is himself inimitable. His imaginations were often as just as they were bold and strong. He had a natural discretion which never could have been taught him, and his judgment was strong and penetrating. He seems to have wanted nothing but time and leisure for thought, to have found out those rules of which he appears so ignorant. His characters are always drawn justly, exactly, graphically, except where he failed by not knowing history or the poetical art. He has for the most part more fairly distinguished them than any of his successors have done, who have falsified them, or confounded them, by making love the predominant quality in all. He had so fine a talent for touching the passions, they are so lively in him, and so truly in nature, that they often touch us more without their due preparations than those

of other tragic poets who have all the beauty of design and all the advantage of incidents. His master-passion was terror, which he has often moved so powerfully and so wonderfully, that we may justly conclude that, if he had had the advantage of art and learning, he would have surpassed the very best and strongest of the ancients. His paintings are often so beautiful and so lively, so graceful and so powerful, especially where he uses them in order to move terror, that there is nothing perhaps more accomplished in our English poetry. His sentiments, for the most part, in his best tragedies, are noble, generous, easy and natural, and adapted to the persons who use them. His expression is in many places good and pure after a hundred years ; simple, though elevated — graceful, though bold — and easy, though strong. He seems to have been the very original of our English tragical harmony ; that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trisyllable terminations. For that diversity distinguishes it from heroic harmony, and, bringing it nearer to common use, makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose ; we make such verse in common conversation. If Shakespear had these great qualities by nature, what would he not have been if he had joined to so happy a genius learning and the poetical art !”

It was this eternal gabble about rules of art, this blindness to the truth that the living power of Shakspeare had its own organization, that set the metre-mongers of that day upon the task of improving Shakspeare. Dennis was himself one of the great improvers. Poetical justice was one of the rules for which they clamoured. Duncan and Banquo ought not to perish in Macbeth, nor Desdemona in Othello, nor Cordelia and her father in Lear, nor Brutus in Julius Cæsar, nor young Hamlet in Hamlet. So Dennis argues : — “ The good and the bad perishing promiscuously in the best of Shakespear’s tragedies, there can be either none or very weak instruction in them.” In this spirit Dennis himself sets to work to remodel Coriolanus : — “ Not only Aufidius, but the Roman tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, appear to me to cry aloud for poetic vengeance ; for they are guilty of two faults, neither of which ought to go unpunished.” Dennis is not only a mender of Shakspeare’s catastrophes, but he applies himself to make Shakspeare’s verses all smooth and proper, according to the rules of art. One example will be sufficient. He was no common man who attempted to reduce the following lines to classical regularity : —

“ Boy ! False hound !

If you have writ your annals true, ’tis there,
That, like an eagle in a dovecote, I
Flutter’d your Volsces in Corioli.
Alone I did it — Boy ! ”

John Dennis has accomplished the feat : —

“ This boy, that, like an eagle in a dovecote,
Flutter'd a thousand Volsces in Corioli,
And did it without second or acquittance,
Thus sends their mighty chief to mourn in hell.”

The alteration of “ The Tempest ” by Davenant and Dryden was, as we have mentioned, an attempt to meet the taste of the town by music and spectacle. Shadwell went farther, and turned it into a regular opera ; and an opera it remained even in Garrick's time, who tried his hand upon the same experiment. Dennis was a reformer both in comedy and tragedy. He metamorphosed *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into “ *The Comical Gallant*,” and prefixed an essay to it on the degeneracy of the taste for poetry. Davenant changed *Measure for Measure* into “ *The Law against Lovers*.” It is difficult to understand how a clever man and something of a poet should have set about his work after this fashion. This is Shakspeare's *Isabella* : —

“ Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet,
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder : nothing but thunder.
Merciful heaven !
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,
Splitt'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle.”

This is Davenant's : —

“ If men could thunder
As great Jove does, Jove ne'er would quiet be ;

For every choleric petty officer,
Would use his magazine in heaven for thunder:
We nothing should but thunder hear. Sweet Heaven!
Thou rather with thy stiff and sulph'rous bolt
Dost split the knotty and obdurate oak,
Than the soft myrtle."

"The Law against Lovers" was in principle one of the worst of these alterations ; for it was a hash of two plays—of Measure for Measure, and of Much Ado about Nothing. This was indeed to destroy the organic life of the author. But it is one of the manifestations of the vitality of Shakspeare that, going about their alterations in the regular way, according to the rules of art, the most stupid and prosaic of his improvers have been unable to deprive the natural man of his vigour, even by their most violent depletions. His robustness was too great even for the poetical doctors to destroy it. Lord Lansdowne actually stripped the flesh off Shylock, but the anatomy walked about vigorously for sixty years, till Macklin put the muscles on again. Colley Cibber turned King John into "Papal Tyranny," and the stage King John was made to denounce the Pope and Guy Faux for a century, till Mr. Macready gave us back again the weak and crafty king in his original truth of character. Nahum Tate deposed the Richard II. of Shakspeare wholly and irredeemably, turning him into "The Sicilian Usurper." How Cibber manufactured Richard III. is known to all men. Durfey melted down Cymbeline with no

slight portion of alloy. Tate remodelled Lear, — and such a Lear! Davenant mangled Macbeth; but we can hardly quarrel with him for it, for he gave us the music of Locke in company with his own verses. It has been said, as a proof how little Shakspeare was once read, that Davenant's alteration is quoted in "The Tatler" instead of the original. This is the reasoning of Steevens; but he has not the candour to tell us, that in "The Tatler," No. 111., there is a quotation from Hamlet, with the following remarks: — "This admirable author, as well as the best and greatest men of all ages and of all nations, seems to have had his mind thoroughly seasoned with religion, as is evident by many passages in his plays, that would not be suffered by a modern audience." Steevens infers, that Steele, or Addison, was not a reader of Shakspeare, because Macbeth is quoted from an acted edition; and that, therefore, Shakspeare was not read generally. If a hurried writer in a daily paper (as "The Tatler" was) were to quote from some acted editions at the present day he might fall into the same error; and yet he might be an ardent student of Shakspeare, in a nation of enthusiastic admirers. The early Essayists offer abundant testimonies, indeed, of their general admiration of the poet. In No. 68. of "The Tatler," he is "the great master who ever commands our tears." In No. 160. of "The Spectator" Shakspeare is put amongst the first class of great geniuses, in com-

pany with Homer ; and this paper contains a remarkable instance of a juster taste than one might expect from the author of "Cato :"—"We are to consider that the rule of observing what the French call the *bienséance* in an allusion has been found out of later years, and in the colder regions of the world ; where we could make some amends for our want of force and spirit, by a scrupulous nicety and exactness in our compositions."* In "The Spectator," 419., amongst the papers on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," Shakspeare's delineations of supernatural beings are thus mentioned :— "Among the English, Shakspeare has incomparably excelled all others. That noble extravagance of fancy, which he had in so great perfection, thoroughly qualified him to touch this weak superstitious part of his reader's imagination ; and made him capable of succeeding where he had nothing to support him besides the strength of his own genius. There is something so wild, and yet so solemn, in the speeches of his ghosts, fairies, witches, and the like imaginary persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, though we have no rule by which to judge of them ; and must confess, if there are such beings in the

* Mr. De Quincey is certainly mistaken when he says, that "Addison has never in one instance quoted or made any reference to Shakspear." No. 160. bears the signature of C., and immediately follows "The Vision of Mirza," bearing the same signature.

world, it looks highly probable they should talk and act as he has represented them."

We have again an instance of Addison's good taste in his remarks upon the critical notions of poetical justice, which he calls "a ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism." Of the best plays which end unhappily he mentions Othello, with others, and adds, "King Lear is an admirable tragedy of the same kind, as Shakspeare wrote it; but as it is reformed according to the chimerical notion of poetical justice, in my humble opinion it has lost half its beauty." All this exhibits a better taste than we find in Gildon and Dennis; and it certainly is very remarkable that Addison, who in his own tragedy was laboriously correct, as it was called, should have taken no occasion to comment upon the irregularities of Shakspeare. Mr. De Quincey says of Addison, "The feeble constitution of the poetic faculty as existing in himself forbade him sympathising with Shakespear." The feebleness of the poetic faculty makes the soundness of the judgment more conspicuous.

CHAPTER IV.

THE commencement of the eighteenth century produced the first of the critical editions of Shakspeare. In 1709 appeared "Shakespeare's Plays Revised and Corrected, with an Account of his

Life and Writings, by N. Rowe." We should mention that the third edition of Shakspeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, in folio, appeared in 1664. It has been said that the greater number of the copies of this edition were destroyed in the Fire of London; and a writer whom we must once more quote says, "During a whole century, only four editions of his complete works, and these small, were published; and there would only have been three, but for the destructive Fire of London in 1666."* The destruction by the fire is just as much proved as the smallness of the edition. One of our best bibliographers, Mr. Lowndes, whose "Bibliographer's Manual" is a model of accuracy, doubts the statement of the destruction by the fire, "though it has been frequently repeated." Upon the face of it the statement is improbable. If it were a good speculation to print the book two years before the fire, and the stock so printed had been destroyed in the fire, it would have been an equally good speculation to have reprinted it immediately after the fire; and yet the fourth edition did not appear till 1685. Some of the copies of the third edition bear the date of 1663; and we have no doubt that the book was then generally published; for Pepys, under the date of December 10th, 1663, has a curious bibliographical entry:—"To St. Paul's Churchyard, to my bookseller's, and could not

* Life of Shakespear in "Lardner's Cyclopædia."

tell whether to lay out my money for books of pleasure, as plays, which my nature was most earnest in ; but at last, after seeing Chaucer, Dugdale's 'History of Paul's,' Stow's 'London,' Gesner, 'History of Trent,' besides Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont's plays, I at last chose Dr. Fuller's 'Worthies,' 'The Cabbala, or Collections of Letters of State,' and a little book, 'Delices de Hollande,' with another little book or two, all of good use or serious pleasure ; and 'Hudibras,' both parts, the book now in greatest fashion for drollery, though I cannot, I confess, see enough where the wit lies." These two folio editions supplied the readers of Shakspeare for more than forty years, but we are not hence to conclude that he was neglected. Of Ben Jonson during the same period there was only one edition ; of Beaumont and Fletcher only one ; of Spenser only one. Rowe's edition of Shakspeare, we doubt not, supplied a general want. Its critical merits were but small. The facts of the "Life" which he prefixes have been sufficiently noticed by us in another place. The opinions expressed in that "Life" are few, and are put forth with little pretension. As might be expected they fully admit the excellence of Shakspeare, but they somewhat fall into the besetting sin of attempting to elevate his genius by depreciating his knowledge :—"It is without controversy that in his works we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients. The

delicacy of his taste, and the natural bent of his own great genius (equal, if not superior, to some of the best of theirs), would certainly have led him to read and study them with so much pleasure that some of their fine images would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mixed with, his own writings ; so that his not copying at least something from them may be an argument of his never having read them. Whether his ignorance of the ancients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a dispute : for though the knowledge of them might have made him more correct, yet it is not improbable but that the regularity and deference for them, which would have attended that correctness, might have restrained some of that fire, impetuosity, and even beautiful extravagance, which we admire in Shakspeare : and I believe we are better pleased with those thoughts, altogether new and uncommon, which his own imagination supplied him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful passages out of the Greek and Latin poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a master of the English language to deliver them." Rowe also falls into the notion that Shakspeare did not arrive at his perfection by repeated experiment and assiduous labour,—a theory which still has its believers :—"It would be without doubt a pleasure to any man, curious in things of this kind, to see and know what was the first essay of a fancy like Shakspeare's. Perhaps we are not to

look for his beginnings, like those of other authors, among their least perfect writings ; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that, for aught I know, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, and had the most fire and strength of imagination in them, were the best. I would not be thought by this to mean that his fancy was so loose and extravagant as to be independent on the rule and government of judgment ; but that what he thought was commonly so great, so justly and rightly conceived in itself, that it wanted little or no correction, and was immediately approved by an impartial judgment at the first sight." He then enters into a brief criticism of some of the leading plays. In speaking of *The Tempest*, he mentions the observation upon the character of Caliban " which three very great men concurred in making "—telling us in a note that these were Lord Falkland, Lord Chief Justice Vaughan, and Mr. Selden—" That Shakspeare had not only found out a new character in his Caliban, but had also devised and adapted a new manner of language for that character." Of Shakspeare's plays, with reference to their art, he thus speaks :—" If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these by those rules which are established by Aristotle and taken from the model of the Grecian stage, it would be no very hard task to find a great many faults ; but as Shakspeare lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made

acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a man that lived in a state of almost universal licence and ignorance: there was no established judge, but every one took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy. When one considers that there is not one play before him of a reputation good enough to entitle it to an appearance on the present stage, it cannot but be a matter of great wonder that he should advance dramatic poetry so far as he did." A second edition of Rowe's "Shakespeare" appeared in 1714.

In 1725 Pope produced his edition, magnificent as far as printing went, in six volumes quarto. Of its editorial merits we may say a few words when we have to speak of Theobald. His Preface is a masterly composition, containing many just views elegantly expressed. The criticism is neither profound nor original; but there is a tone of quiet sense about it which shows that Pope properly appreciated Shakspeare's general excellence. He believes, in common with most of his time, that this excellence was attained by intuition; and that the finest results were produced by felicitous accidents:—

"If ever any author deserved the name of an *original* it was Shakspeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature, it proceeded through Egyptian

strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakspeare was inspiration indeed : he is not so much an imitator as an instrument of Nature ; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.

“ His *characters* are so much Nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image : each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakspeare is as much an individual as those in life itself ; it is as impossible to find any two alike ; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character we must add the wonderful preservation of it ; which is such throughout his plays, that, had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.

“ The *power* over our *passions* was never possessed in a more eminent degree, or displayed in so different instances. Yet all along there is seen no labour, no pains to raise them ; no preparation to guide or guess to the effect, or be perceived to

lead toward it ; but the heart swells, and the tears burst out, just at the proper places : we are surprised the moment we weep ; and yet upon reflection find the passion so just, that we should be surprised if we had not wept, and wept at that very moment.

“ How astonishing it is again that the passions directly opposite to these, laughter and spleen, are no less at his command ! That he is not more a master of the *great* than of the *ridiculous* in human nature ; of our noblest tendernesses, than of our vainest foibles ; of our strongest emotions, than of our idlest sensations !

“ Nor does he only excel in the passions ; in the coolness of reflection and reasoning he is full as admirable. His *sentiments* are not only in general the most pertinent and judicious upon every subject ; but, by a talent very peculiar, something between penetration and felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. This is perfectly amazing from a man of no education or experience in those great and public scenes of life which are usually the subject of his thoughts ; so that he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance, and to be the only author that gives ground for a very new opinion—that the philosopher, and even the man of the world, may be *born* as well as the poet.”

These are the excellences of Shakspeare ; but Pope holds that he has as great defects, and he sets himself to excuse these by arguing that it was necessary to please the populace. He then proceeds : —

“ To judge, therefore, of Shakspeare by Aristotle’s rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another. He wrote to the *people*, and wrote at first without patronage from the better sort, and therefore without aims of pleasing them ; without assistance or advice from the learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them ; without that knowledge of the best models, the ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them ; in a word, without any views of reputation, and of what poets are pleased to call immortality ; some or all of which have encouraged the vanity, or animated the ambition, of other writers.

“ Yet it must be observed, that, when his performances had merited the protection of his prince, and when the encouragement of the court had succeeded to that of the town, the works of his riper years are manifestly raised above those of his former. The dates of his plays sufficiently evidence that his productions improved in proportion to the respect he had for his auditors. And I make no doubt this observation would be found true in every instance, were but editions extant from which we might learn the exact time

when every piece was composed, and whether wrote for the town or the court.

“Another cause (and no less strong than the former) may be deduced from our poet’s being a *player*, and forming himself first upon the judgments of that body of men whereof he was a member. They have ever had a standard to themselves, upon other principles than those of Aristotle. As they live by the majority, they know no rule but that of pleasing the present humour, and complying with the wit in fashion—a consideration which brings all their judgment to a short point. Players are just such judges of what is *right* as tailors are of what is *graceful*. And in this view it will be but fair to allow that most of our author’s faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a poet than to his right judgment as a player.”

Of Shakspeare’s learning his editor thus speaks : —

“As to his *want of learning* it may be necessary to say something more : there is certainly a vast difference between *learning* and *languages*. How far he was ignorant of the latter I cannot determine ; but it is plain he had much reading at least, if they will not call it learning. Nor is it any great matter, if a man has knowledge, whether he has it from one language or from another. Nothing is more evident than that he had a taste of natural philosophy, mechanics, ancient and modern history, poetical learning, and mythology :

we find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity. . . . The manners of other nations in general, the Egyptians, Venetians, French, &c., are drawn with equal propriety. Whatever object of nature or branch of science he either speaks of or describes, it is always with competent if not extensive knowledge: his descriptions are still exact; all his metaphors appropriated, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject. When he treats of ethic or politic we may constantly observe a wonderful justness of distinction as well as extent of comprehension. No one is more a master of the poetical story, or has more frequent allusions to the various parts of it. Mr. Waller (who has been celebrated for this last particular) has not shown more learning this way than Shakspeare. . . .

“ I am inclined to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our author and Ben Jonson, as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expense of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable as that, because Ben Jonson had much the more learning, it was said on the one hand that Shakspeare had none at all; and because Shakspeare had much the most wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other that Jonson wanted both. Because Shakspeare borrowed nothing, it was said that Ben Jonson borrowed everything. Because Jonson did not write ex-

tempore, he was reproached with being a year about every piece ; and because Shakspeare wrote with ease and rapidity, they cried, he never once made a blot. Nay, the spirit of opposition ran so high, that whatever those of the one side objected to the other was taken at the rebound, and turned into praises, as injudiciously as their antagonists before had made them objections."

Much of Pope's Preface is then occupied with illustrations of his opinion that Shakspeare's works have come down to us defaced with innumerable blunders and absurdities which are not to be attributed to the author. We cannot at all yield our consent to this opinion, which goes upon the assumption that, whenever there is an obscure passage ; whenever "mean conceits and ribaldries" are found ; whenever "low scenes of mobs, plebeians, and clowns" are very prominent ; there the players have been at work ; and he thus argues upon the assumption :—"If we give in to this opinion, how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him ! And even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary additions, expunctions, transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of characters and persons, wrong application of speeches, corruptions of innumerable passages by the ignorance and wrong corrections of them again by the impertinence of his first editors !

From one or other of these considerations I am verily persuaded that the greatest and the grossest part of what are thought his errors would vanish, and leave his character in a light very different from that disadvantageous one in which it now appears to us." There is a larger question even than this that Pope propounds. *Are these parts and passages low and vicious? Have we these corruptions and imperfections?* We believe not. Pope accepted Shakspeare in the spirit of his time, and that was not favourable to the proper understanding of him. His concluding observations are characteristic of his critical power:—"I will conclude by saying of Shakspeare, that, with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his *drama*, one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finished and regular as upon an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture compared with a neat modern building; the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. It must be allowed that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much the greater variety, and much the nobler apartments; though we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence though many of the parts are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur."

In 1726 Lewis Theobald published a tract entitled "*Shakespear Restored, or Specimens of*"

Blunders Committed and Unamended in Pope's Edition of this Poet." In Pope's second edition of Shakspeare, which appeared in 1728, was inserted this contemptuous notice:—"Since the publication of our first edition, there having been some attempts upon Shakspeare published by Lewis Theobald (which he would not communicate during the time wherein that edition was preparing for the press, when we, by public advertisements, did request the assistance of all lovers of this author), we have inserted, in this impression, as many of 'em as are judged of any the least advantage to the poet; the whole amounting to about twenty-five words." In the same year came out "The Dunciad," of which Theobald was the hero:—

" High on a gorgeous seat that far outshone
Henley's gilt tub, or Flecknoe's Irish throne,
Great Tibbald nods."

In a few years Theobald was deposed from this throne, and there, then, "Great Cibber sate." The facility with which Theobald was transformed to Cibber is one of the many proofs that Pope threw his darts and dirt about him at random. But Theobald took a just revenge. In 1733 he produced an edition of Shakspeare, in seven volumes octavo, which annihilated Pope's quartos and duodecimos. The title-page of Theobald's Shakspeare bore that it was "collated with the oldest copies, and corrected, with Notes." Pope's edition was not again reprinted in London; but

of Theobald's there have been many subsequent editions, and Steevens asserts that of his first edition thirteen thousand copies were sold. Looking at the advantage which Pope possessed in the pre-eminence of his literary reputation, the preference which was so decidedly given to Theobald's editions is a proof that the public thought for themselves in the matter of Shakspeare. Pope was not fitted for the more laborious duties of an editor. He collated, indeed, the early copies, but he set about the emendation of the text in a manner so entirely arbitrary, suppressing passage after passage upon the principle that the players had been at work here, and a blundering transcriber there, that no reader of Shakspeare could rely upon the integrity of Pope's version. Theobald states the contrary mode in which *he* proceeded :—

“ Wherever the author's sense is clear and discoverable (though, perchance, low and trivial), I have not by any innovation tampered with his text, out of an ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old copies have done.

“ Where, through all the former editions, a passage has laboured under flat nonsense and invincible darkness, if by the addition or alteration of a letter or two, or a transposition in the pointing, I have restored to him both sense and sentiment, such corrections, I am persuaded, will need no indulgence.

“ And whenever I have taken a greater latitude

and liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my corrections and conjectures by parallel passages and authorities from himself, the surest means of expounding any author whatsoever."

Dr. Johnson accurately enough describes the causes and consequences of Pope's failure: — "Confidence is the common consequence of success. They whose excellence of any kind has been loudly celebrated are ready to conclude that their powers are universal. Pope's edition fell below his own expectations, and he was so much offended, when he was found to have left anything for others to do, that he passed the latter part of his life in a state of hostility with verbal criticism." But Johnson does not exhibit his usual good sense and knowledge of mankind when he attributes Theobald's success to the world's compassion. He calls him weak and ignorant, mean and faithless, petulant and ostentatious; but he affirms that this editor, "by the good luck of having Pope for his enemy, has escaped, and escaped alone, with reputation, from this undertaking. So willingly does the world support those who solicit favour against those who command reverence; and so easily is he praised whom no man can envy." This is mere fine writing. The real secret of Theobald's success is stated by Johnson himself: — "Pope was succeeded by Theobald, a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsic splendour of genius, with little of the

artificial light of learning, but zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it. He collated the ancient copies, and rectified many errors. A man so anxiously scrupulous might have been expected to do more, but what little he did was commonly right." It was because Theobald was "anxiously scrupulous," because he did not attempt "to do more" than an editor ought to do, that he had the public support. Nearly every succeeding editor, in his scorn of Theobald, his confidence in himself, and, what was the most influential, his want of reverence for his author, endeavoured to make Shakspeare "speak better than the old copies have done." Each for a while had his applause, but it was not a lasting fame.

There is little in Theobald's Preface to mark the progress of opinion on the writings of Shakspeare. Some parts of this Preface are held to have been written by Warburton ; but if so, his arrogance must have been greatly modified by Theobald's judgment. There is not much general remark upon the character of the poet's writings ; but what we find is sensibly conceived and not inelegantly expressed. We shall content ourselves with extracting one passage :— "In how many points of sight must we be obliged to gaze at this great poet ! In how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him ! Whether we view him on the side of art or nature, he ought equally to engage our attention : whether we respect the force and greatness of his genius, the extent of his know-

ledge and reading, the power and address with which he throws out and applies either nature or learning, there is ample scope both for our wonder and pleasure. If his diction and the clothing of his thoughts attract us, how much more must we be charmed with the richness and variety of his images and ideas ! If his images and ideas steal into our souls and strike upon our fancy, how much are they improved in price when we come to reflect with what propriety and justness they are applied to character ! If we look into his characters, and how they are furnished and proportioned to the employment he cuts out for them, how are we taken up with the mastery of his portraits ! What draughts of nature ! What variety of originals, and how differing each from the other !”

Undeterred by the failure of Pope in his slashing amputations, Sir Thomas Hanmer appeared, in 1744, with a splendid edition in six volumes quarto, printed at the Oxford University Press. Nothing can be more satisfactory than the paper and the type. The work was intended as a monument to the memory of Shakspeare ; one of the modes in which the national homage was to be expressed :—“ As a fresh acknowledgment hath lately been paid to his merit, and a high regard to his name and memory, by erecting his statue at a public expense ; so it is desired that this new edition of his works, which hath cost some attention and care, may be looked upon as another small

monument designed and dedicated to his honour." Capell, who came next as an editor, says truly of Hanmer that he "pursues a track in which it is greatly to be hoped he will never be followed in the publication of any authors whatsoever, for this were in effect to annihilate them if carried a little further." Collins's "Epistle to Sir Thomas Hanmer on his Edition on Shakspeare's Works" is an elegant though not very vigorous attempt to express the universal admiration that the people of England felt for the great national poet. The verse-homage to Shakspeare after the days of Milton had no very original character. The cuckoo-note with which these warblers generally interspersed their varied lays was the echo of Milton's "wood-notes wild," which they did not perceive had a limited application to some particular play—As You Like It, for instance. In Rowe's prologue to "Jane Shore" we have,—

"In such an age immortal Shakspeare wrote,
By no quaint rules nor hamp'ring critics taught;
With rough majestic force he mov'd the heart,
And strength and nature made amends for art."

Thomson asks—

"For lofty sense,
Creative fancy, and inspection keen
Through the deep windings of the human heart,
Is not wild Shakspeare thine and nature's boast?"

T. Seward, addressing Stratford, says,—

"Thy bard was thine unschool'd."

Collins's Epistle begins thus, speaking of the works of Shakspeare:—

“ Hard was the lot those injur’d strains endur’d,
Unown’d by science.”

But Collins, in many respects a true poet, has a higher inspiration in his invocations of the great master of the drama than most of his fellows :—

“ O more than all in powerful genius bless’d,
Come, take thine empire o’er the willing breast !
Whate’er the wounds this youthful heart shall feel,
Thy songs support me, and thy morals heal.
There every thought the poet’s warmth may raise,
There native music dwells in all the lays.”

To Hanmer succeeded Warburton, with a new edition of Pope enriched with his own most original notes. If it were not painful to associate Shakspeare, the great master of practical wisdom, with a critic who delights in the most extravagant paradoxes, we might prefer the amusement of Warburton’s edition to toiling through the heaps of verbal criticism which later years saw heaped up. Warburton, of course, belonged to the school of slashing emendators. The opening of his preface tells us what we are to expect from him :—

“ It hath been no unusual thing for writers, when dissatisfied with the patronage or judgment of their own times, to appeal to posterity for a fair hearing. Some have even thought fit to apply to it in the first instance, and to decline acquaintance with the public till envy and prejudice had quite subsided. But of all the trusters to futurity, commend me to the author of the following poems, who not only left it to time to do him justice as it would, but to find him out as it could : for, what

between too great attention to his profit as a player, and too little to his reputation as a poet, his works, left to the care of door-keepers and prompters, hardly escaped the common fate of those writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own fortune, and unprotected by party or cabal. At length, indeed, they struggled into light ; but so disguised and travestied, that no classic author, after having run ten secular stages through the blind cloisters of monks and canons, ever came out in half so maimed and mangled a condition."

There is little in Warburton's preface which possesses any lasting interest, perhaps with the exception of his defence against the charge that editing Shakspeare was unsuitable to his clerical profession :—

"The great Saint Chrysostom, a name consecrated to immortality by his virtue and eloquence, is known to have been so fond of Aristophanes as to wake with him at his studies, and to sleep with him under his pillow ; and I never heard that this was objected either to his piety or his preaching, not even in those times of pure zeal and primitive religion. Yet, in respect of Shakspeare's great sense, Aristophanes's best wit is but buffoonery ; and in comparison of Aristophanes's freedoms, Shakspeare writes with the purity of a vestal. . . . Of all the literary exertions of speculative men, whether designed for the use or entertainment of the world, there are none of so much importance, or what are more our immediate concern, than

those which let us into the knowledge of our nature. Others may exercise the reason, or amuse the imagination ; but these only can improve the heart, and form the human mind to wisdom. Now, in this science our Shakspeare is confessed to occupy the foremost place, whether we consider the amazing sagacity with which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action, or his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and living paintings which he has given us of all our passions, appetites, and pursuits. These afford a lesson which can never be too often repeated, or too constantly inculcated ; and to engage the reader's due attention to it hath been one of the principal objects of this edition.

“ As this science (whatever profound philosophers may think) is, to the rest, *in things*, so, *in words* (whatever supercilious pedants may talk), every one's mother-tongue is to all other languages. This hath still been the sentiment of nature and true wisdom. Hence, the greatest men of antiquity never thought themselves better employed than in cultivating their own country idiom.”

CHAPTER V.

IT was in the year 1741 that David Garrick at once leaped into eminence as an actor, such as had not been won by any man for half a century. He was the true successor of Betterton, Harris, and Bur-

bage. His principal fame was, however, like theirs, founded upon Shakspeare. But it is a mistake to imagine that there had not been a constant succession of actors of Shakspeare's great characters, from the death of Betterton to Garrick's appearance. His first character in London was Richard III. He made all the great parts of Shakspeare familiar to the play-going public for five-and-thirty years. "The Alchymist" and the "Volpone" of Ben Jonson were sometimes played; "The Chances," and "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife," of Beaumont and Fletcher; but we are told by Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies," that, of their fifty-four plays, only these two preserved their rank on the stage. This is a pretty convincing proof of what the public opinion of Shakspeare was in the middle of the last century. The Prologue of Samuel Johnson, spoken by Garrick at the opening of Drury-lane Theatre in 1747, is an eloquent expression of the same opinion:—

"When Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes
First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakspeare rose;
Each change of many-colour'd life he drew,
Exhausted worlds, and then imagin'd new:
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain.
His powerful strokes presiding truth impress'd,
And unresisted passion storm'd the breast.

"Then Jonson came, instructed from the school
To please in method, and invent by rule;
His studious patience and laborious art
By regular approach essay'd the heart:

Cold approbation gave the lingering bays ;
For those who durst not censure scarce could praise.
A mortal born, he met the gen'ral doom,
But left, like Egypt's kings, a lasting tomb.

“ The wits of Charles found easier ways to fame,
Nor wish'd for Jonson's art, or Shakspeare's fame.
Themselves they studied ; as they felt, they writ :
Intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit.
Vice always found a sympathetic friend ;
They pleas'd their age, and did not aim to mend.
Yet bards like these aspir'd to lasting praise,
And proudly hop'd to pimp in future days.
Their cause was gen'ral, their supports were strong ;
Their slaves were willing, and their reign was long :
Till Shame regain'd the post that Sense betray'd,
And Virtue call'd Oblivion to her aid.

“ Then, crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as refin'd,
For years the pow'r of Tragedy declin'd ;
From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,
Till declamation roar'd whilst passion slept ;
Yet still did Virtue deign the stage to tread,
Philosophy remain'd though Nature fled.
But forc'd, at length, her ancient reign to quit,
She saw great Faustus lay the ghost of Wit ;
Exulting Folly hail'd the joyous day,
And pantomime and song confirm'd her sway.”

It is tolerably evident, from the whole tenour of this celebrated prologue, that of the early dramatists Shakspeare reigned upon the stage supreme, if not almost alone. It has been the fault of actors, and the flatterers of actors, to believe that a dramatic poet is only known to the world through their lips. Garrick was held to have given life to Shakspeare. The following inscrip-

tion on Garrick's tomb in Westminster Abbey has been truly held by Charles Lamb to be "a farrago of false thoughts and nonsense :"—

"To paint fair Nature, by divine command,
Her magic pencil in his glowing hand,
A Shakspeare rose ; then, to expand his fame
Wide o'er this breathing world, a Garrick came.
Though sunk to death the forms the Poet drew,
The Actor's genius bade them breathe anew ;
Though, like the bard himself, in night they lay,
Immortal Garrick call'd them back to day :
And till Eternity with power sublime
Shall mark the mortal hour of hoary Time,
Shakspeare and Garrick like twin stars shall shine,
And earth irradiate with a beam divine."

Up to the end of the first half of the eighteenth century, when, according to the epitaph, the poet's forms were sunk in death and lay in night, there had been thirteen editions of Shakspeare's collected works, nine of which had appeared during the preceding forty years. Of Ben Jonson there had been three editions in the seventeenth century, and one in the eighteenth ; of Beaumont and Fletcher two in the seventeenth century, and one in the eighteenth. Yet, absurd and impertinent as it may be to talk of immortal Garrick calling the plays of Shakspeare back to day, it cannot be denied that the very power of those plays to create a school of great actors was in itself a cause of their extension amongst readers. The most monstrous alterations, perpetrated with the worst taste, and with

the most essential ignorance of Shakspeare's art were still in some sort tributes to his power. The actors sent many to read Shakspeare with a true delight; and then it was felt how little he needed the aid of acting, and how much indeed of his highest excellence could only be received into the mind by reverent meditation.

In 1765 appeared, in eight volumes octavo, "The Plays of William Shakspeare, with the Corrections and Illustrations of various Commentators: to which are added Notes by Samuel Johnson." This was the foundation of the variorum editions, the principle of which has been to select from all the commentary, or nearly all, that has been produced, every opinion upon a passage, however conflicting. The respective value of the critics who had preceded him are fully discussed by Johnson in the latter part of his Preface: it will be unnecessary for us to enter upon this branch of the subject, which was only of temporary interest. But the larger portion of Johnson's Preface not only to a certain extent represents the tone of opinion in Johnson's age, but is written with so much pomp of diction, with such apparent candour, and with such abundant manifestations of good sense, that, perhaps, more than any other production, it has influenced the public opinion of Shakspeare up to this day. That the influence has been, for the most part, evil, we have no hesitation in believing. Before proceeding to state the grounds

of this belief we think it right to reprint the greater part of this celebrated composition — all, indeed, that permanently belongs to the subject of our poet : —

DR. JOHNSON'S PREFACE.

“THAT praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox ; or those who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy will be at last bestowed by time.

“Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes cooperated with chance ; all perhaps are more willing to honour past than present excellence ; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst per-

formance ; and when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

“ To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative ; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed, they have often examined and compared ; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep, or a mountain high, without the knowledge of many mountains and many rivers ; so, in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it hath been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration immediately displays its power, and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years ; but works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavours. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square ; but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers was at once discovered to be perfect ; but the poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the

common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

“ The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises therefore not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

“ The poet of whose works I have undertaken the revision may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit. Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost ; and every topic of merriment, or motive of sorrow, which the modes of artificial life afforded him, now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favour and competition are at an end ; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished ; his works support no opinion with arguments, nor supply any faction with invectives ; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity ; but are read without any

other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained : yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission.

“ But because human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible ; and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion ; it is proper to inquire by what peculiarities of excellence Shakspeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.

“ Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight a while, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest ; the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

“ Shakspeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature ; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world ; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can

operate but upon small numbers ; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions ; they are the genuine progeny of common humanity ; such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual, in those of Shakspeare it is commonly a species.

“ It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakspeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. It was said of Euripides, that every verse was a precept ; and it may be said of Shakspeare, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable and the tenour of his dialogue ; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

“ It will not easily be imagined how much Shakspeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life, but by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation, that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified

for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of Shakspeare. The theatre, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences.

“ Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable ; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires, inconsistent with each other ; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony ; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow ; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed ; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions ; and, as it has no great influence upon the sum of life.

it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

“Characters thus ample and general were not easily discriminated and preserved, yet perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say, with Pope, that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker, because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristical; but, perhaps, though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right, when there is reason for choice.

“Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from the play, or from the tale, would be equally deceived. Shakspeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion; even where the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the

most natural passions and most frequent incidents, so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakspeare approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but, if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigences, but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed.

“ This therefore is the praise of Shakspeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

“ His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of critics who form their judgments upon narrower principles. Dennis and Rymer think his Romans not sufficiently Roman; and Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis is offended that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard. But Shakspeare always makes nature predominate over accident; and, if he preserves the essen-

tial character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and, wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to show an usurper and a murderer not only odious, but despicable; he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds! a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.

“The censure which he has incurred by mixing comic and tragic scenes, as it extends to all his works, deserves more consideration. Let the fact be first stated, and then examined.

“Shakspeare’s plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the

malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

“ Out of this chaos of mingled purposes and casualties, the ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected, some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities; some the momentous vicissitudes of life, and some the lighter occurrences; some the terrors of distress, and some the gaieties of prosperity. Thus rose the two modes of imitation known by the name of *tragedy* and *comedy*,—compositions intended to promote different ends by contrary means, and considered as so little allied, that I do not recollect among the Greeks or Romans a single writer who attempted both.

“ Shakspeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters, and, in these successive evolutions of the design, sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter.

“ That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alternations of exhibition, and

approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life, by showing how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another, and the high and the low co-operate in the general system by unavoidable concatenation.

“It is objected that by this change of scenes the passions are interrupted in their progression, and that the principal event, being not advanced by a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move, which constitutes the perfection of dramatic poetry. This reasoning is so specious, that it is received as true even by those who in daily experience feel it to be false. The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fail to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion. Fiction cannot move so much but that the attention may be easily transferred; and though it must be allowed that pleasing melancholy may be sometimes interrupted by unwelcome levity, yet let it be considered likewise that melancholy is often not pleasing, and that the disturbance of one man may be the relief of another; that different auditors have different habitudes; and that, upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety.

“The players, who in their edition divided our author’s works into comedies, histories, and tragedies, seem not to have distinguished the three kinds by any very exact or definite ideas.

“An action which ended happily to the

principal persons, however serious or distressful through its intermediate incidents, in their opinion constituted a comedy. This idea of a comedy continued long amongst us, and plays were written, which, by changing the catastrophe, were tragedies to-day and comedies to-morrow.

“Tragedy was not in those times a poem of more general dignity or elevation than comedy ; it required only a calamitous conclusion, with which the common criticism of that age was satisfied, whatever lighter pleasure it afforded in its progress.

“History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. It is not always very nicely distinguished from tragedy. There is not much nearer approach to unity of action in the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra than in the history of Richard the Second. But a history might be continued through many plays ; as it had no plan, it had no limits.

“Through all these denominations of the drama, Shakspeare’s mode of composition is the same ; and interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time and exhilarated at another. But, whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story, without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose ; as

he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference.

“ When Shakspeare’s plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire vanish away. The play of Hamlet is opened, without impropriety, by two centinels ; Iago bellows at Brabantio’s window, without injury to the scheme of the play, though in terms which a modern audience would not easily endure ; the character of Polonius is seasonable and useful ; and the Gravediggers themselves may be heard with applause.

“ Shakspeare engaged in dramatic poetry with the world open before him ; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few ; the public judgment was unformed ; he had no example of such fame as might force him upon imitation, nor critics of such authority as might restrain his extravagance : he therefore indulged his natural disposition, and his disposition, as Rymer has remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study what is written at last with little felicity ; but in his comic scenes he seems to produce without labour what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragic scenes there is always something wanting,

but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

“The force of his comic scenes has suffered little diminution from the changes made by a century and a half in manners or in words. As his personages act upon principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places; they are natural, and therefore durable; the adventitious peculiarities of personal habits are only superficial dyes, bright and pleasing for a little while, yet soon fading to a dim tinct, without any remains of former lustre: but the discrimination of true passion are the colours of nature; they pervade the whole mass, and can only perish with the body that exhibits them. The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance which combined them; but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase, nor suffers decay. The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakspeare.

“If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a

certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language as to remain settled and unaltered, this style is probably to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood, without ambition of elegance. The polite are always catching modish innovations, and the learned depart from established forms of speech, in hope of finding or making better; those who wish for distinction forsake the vulgar, when the vulgar is right; but there is a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue. He is therefore more agreeable to the ears of the present age than any other author equally remote, and among his other excellences deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language.

“ These observations are to be considered not as unexceptionably constant, but as containing general and predominant truth. Shakspeare’s familiar dialogue is affirmed to be smooth and clear, yet not wholly without ruggedness or difficulty; as a country may be eminently fruitful, though it has spots unfit for cultivation: his characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable; as the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with protuberances and cavities.

“Shakspeare with his excellences has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown ; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candour higher than truth.

“His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally ; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him ; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked ; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate ; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

“The plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued that he seems not always

fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting for the sake of those which are more easy.

“It may be observed that in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labour to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented.

“He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood, but of possibility. These faults Pope has endeavoured, with more zeal than judgment, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothic mythology of fairies. Shakspeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology, for in the same age Sydney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his ‘Arcadia,’ confounded the pastoral with the feudal times; the days of innocence, quiet, and security with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

“In his comic scenes he is seldom very suc-

cessful when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm ; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious ; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine. The reign of Elizabeth is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality, and reserve ; yet, perhaps, the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

“ In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse as his labour is more. The effusions of passion, which exigence forces out, are for the most part striking and energetic ; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

“ In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction, and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words, which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action ; it should therefore always be rapid and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakspeare found it an

encumbrance, and, instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavoured to reccommend it by dignity and splendour.

“ His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of Nature ; when he endeavoured, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification, and, instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to show how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

“ It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express and will not reject ; he struggles with it a while, and, if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

“ Not that always where the language is intricate the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky ; the equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

“ But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection and mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the

danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. What he does best he soon ceases to do. He is not long soft and pathetic without some idle conceit or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move than he counteracts himself, and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

“A quibble is to Shakspeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents or enchain-
ing it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

“It will be thought strange that, in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and

established by the joint authority of poets and of critics.

“ For his other deviations from the art of writing I resign him to critical justice, without making any other demand in his favour than that which must be indulged to all human excellence—that his virtues be rated with his failings; but from the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him, I shall, with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.

“ His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

“ In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled; he does not endeavour to hide his design, only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events, and Shakspeare is the poet of nature: but his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires—a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are, perhaps, some incidents that might be spared, as in other

poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage ; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

“ To the unities of time and place he has shown no regard ; and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminish their value, and withdraw from them the veneration which, from the time of Corneille, they have very generally received, by discovering that they have given more trouble to the poet than pleasure to the auditor.

“ The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The critics hold it impossible that an action of months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours ; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied, and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress shall lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.

“ From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator who knows that he saw the first act at Alexandria, cannot suppose that he sees the next at Rome, at a distance to which not the dragons

of Medea could in so short a time have transported him ; he knows with certainty that he has not changed his place ; and he knows that place cannot change itself ; that what was a house cannot become a plain ; that what was Thebes can never be Persepolis.

“ Such is the triumphant language with which a critic exults over the misery of an irregular poet, and exults commonly without resistance or reply. It is time therefore to tell him, by the authority of Shakspeare, that he assumes, as an unquestionable principle, a position which, while his breath is forming it into words, his understanding pronounces to be false. It is false that any representation is mistaken for reality ; that any dramatic fable in its materiality was ever credible, or for a single moment was ever credited.

“ The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria and the next at Rome, supposes that when the play opens the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the Ptolemies may take it in half an hour for the promontory of Actium. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation ; if the spectator can be once persuaded that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Cæsar, that a

room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the banks of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in ecstasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.

“The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place ; but the different actions that complete a story may be in places very remote from each other ; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a modern theatre ?

“By supposition, as place is introduced, time may be extended ; the time required by the fable elapses for the most part between the acts ; for, of so much of the action as is represented, the real and poetical duration is the same. If in the first act preparations for war against Mithridates are represented to be made in Rome, the event of the war may, without absurdity, be

represented in the catastrophe as happening in Pontus ; we know that there is neither war, nor preparation for war ; we know that we are neither in Rome nor Pontus ; that neither Mithridates nor Lucullus are before us. The drama exhibits successive imaginations of successive actions, and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene ? Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination ; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation.

“ It will be asked how the drama moves, if it is not credited. It is credited with all the credit due to a drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original ; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed. If there be any fallacy, it is not that we fancy the players, but that we fancy ourselves, unhappy for a moment ; but we rather lament the possibility than suppose the presence of misery, as a mother weeps over her babe when she remembers that

death may take it from her. The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction ; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.

“ Imitations produce pain or pleasure not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind. When the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade, or the fountains coolness ; but we consider how we should be pleased with such fountains playing beside us, and such woods waving over us. We are agitated in reading the history of Henry the Fifth, yet no man takes his book for the field of Agincourt. A dramatic exhibition is a book recited with concomitants that increase or diminish its effect. Familiar comedy is often more powerful on the theatre than in the page ; imperial tragedy is always less. The humour of Petruchio may be heightened by grimace ; but what voice or what gesture can hope to add dignity or force to the soliloquy of Cato ?

“ A play read affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident that the action is not supposed to be real ; and it follows that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of a drama than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass in an hour the life of a hero or the revolutions of an empire.

“Whether Shakspeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide and useless to inquire. We may reasonably suppose that when he rose to notice he did not want the counsels and admonitions of scholars and critics, and that he at last deliberately persisted in a practice which he might have begun by chance. As nothing is essential to the fable but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions, and, by circumscribing the extent of the drama, lessen its variety, I cannot think it much to be lamented that they were not known by him, or not observed ; nor, if such another poet could arise, should I very vehemently reproach him that his first act passed at Venice and his next in Cyprus. Such violations of rules merely positive become the comprehensive genius of Shakspeare, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire : —

‘ Non usque adeo permiscuit imis

Longus summa dies, ut non, si voce Metelli

Serventur leges, malint a Cæsare tolli.’

“Yet, when I speak thus slightly of dramatic rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me ; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected that these precepts have not

been so easily received but for better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is, that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama ; that, though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction ; and that a play, written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shown rather what is possible than what is necessary.

“ He that, without diminution of any other excellence, shall preserve all the unities unbroken, deserves the like applause with the architect who shall display all the orders of architecture in a citadel without any deduction from its strength : but the principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy ; and the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life.

“ Perhaps what I have here not dogmatically but deliberately written may recall the principles of the drama to a new examination. I am almost frightened at my own temerity ; and, when I estimate the fame and the strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion, am ready to sink down in reverential silence ; as Æneas withdrew from the defence of Troy, when he saw Neptune shaking the wall, and Juno heading the besiegers.

“Those whom my arguments cannot persuade to give their approbation to the judgment of Shakspeare, will easily, if they consider the condition of his life, make some allowance for his ignorance.

“Every man’s performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own particular opportunities ; and though to a reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet, as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the inquiry how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers, and how much to casual and adventitious help. The palaces of Peru and Mexico were certainly mean and incommodious habitations, if compared to the houses of European monarchs ; yet who could forbear to view them with astonishment who remembered that they were built without the use of iron ?

“The English nation, in the time of Shakspeare, was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity. The philology of Italy had been transplanted hither in the reign of Henry VIII. ; and the learned languages had been successfully cul-

tivated by Lilly, Linacre, and More ; by Pole, Cheke, and Gardiner ; and afterwards by Smith, Clerk, Haddon, and Ascham. Greek was now taught to boys in the principal schools ; and those who united elegance with learning, read, with great diligence, the Italian and Spanish poets. But literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank. The public was gross and dark ; and to be able to read and write was an accomplishment still valued for its rarity.

“ Nations, like individuals, have their infancy. A people newly awakened to literary curiosity, being yet unacquainted with the true state of things, knows not how to judge of that which is proposed as its resemblance. Whatever is remote from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar as to childish credulity ; and of a country unenlightened by learning the whole people is the vulgar. The study of those who then aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments. ‘ The Death of Arthur ’ was the favourite volume.

“ The mind which has feasted on the luxurious wonders of fiction has no taste of the insipidity of truth. A play which imitated only the common occurrences of the world would, upon the admirers of ‘ Palmerin ’ and ‘ Guy of Warwick,’ have made little impression ; he that wrote for such an audience was under the necessity of

looking round for strange events and fabulous transactions, and that incredibility, by which maturer knowledge is offended, was the chief recommendation of writings to unskilful curiosity.

“Our author’s plots are generally borrowed from novels ; and it is reasonable to suppose that he chose the most popular, such as were read by many, and related by more ; for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama had they not held the thread of the story in their hands.

“The stories which we now find only in remoter authors were in his time accessible and familiar. The fable of *As You Like It*, which is supposed to be copied from Chaucer’s ‘*Gamelyn*,’ was a little pamphlet of those times ; and old Mr. Cibber remembered the tale of Hamlet in plain English prose, which the critics have now to seek in Saxo Grammaticus.

“His English histories he took from English chronicles and English ballads ; and as the ancient writers were made known to his countrymen by versions, they supplied him with new subjects ; he dilated some of Plutarch’s ‘*Lives*’ into plays, when they had been translated by North.

“His plots, whether historical or fabulous, are always crowded with incidents, by which the attention of a rude people was more easily caught than by sentiment or argumentation ; and such is the power of the marvellous, even over those, who

despise it, that every man finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of Shakspeare than of any other writer ; others please us by particular speeches, but he always makes us anxious for the event, and has, perhaps, excelled all but Homer in securing the first purpose of a writer, by exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity, and compelling him that reads his work to read it through.

“ The shows and bustle with which his plays abound have the same original. As knowledge advances, pleasure passes from the eye to the ear, but returns, as it declines, from the ear to the eye. Those to whom our author’s labours were exhibited had more skill in pomps or processions than in poetical language, and perhaps wanted some visible and discriminated events, as comments on the dialogue. He knew how he should most please ; and whether his practice is more agreeable to nature, or whether his example has prejudiced the nation, we still find that on our stage something must be done as well as said, and inactive declamation is very coldly heard, however musical or elegant, passionate or sublime.

“ Voltaire expresses his wonder that our author’s extravagances are endured by a nation which has seen the tragedy of ‘ Cato.’ Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakspeare of men. We find in ‘ Cato ’ innumerable beauties which enamour us

of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions : we place it with the fairest and the noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunction with learning ; but Othello is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius. ‘ Cato ’ affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments in diction easy, elevated, and harmonious ; but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart ; the composition refers us only to the writer ; we pronounce the name of Cato, but we think on Addison.

“ The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers : the composition of Shakspeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses ; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished into brightness. Shakspeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustable plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.

“ It has been much disputed whether Shakspeare owed his excellence to his own native force,

or whether he had the common helps of scholastic education, the precepts of critical science, and the examples of ancient authors.

“ There has always prevailed a tradition that Shakspeare wanted learning, that he had no regular education, nor much skill in the dead languages. Jonson, his friend, affirms that *he had small Latin and less Greek*; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the character and acquisitions of Shakspeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed.

“ Some have imagined that they have discovered deep learning in imitations of old writers; but the examples which I have known urged were drawn from books translated in his time, or were such easy coincidences of thought as will happen to all who consider the same subjects, or such remarks on life or axioms of morality as float in conversation, and are transmitted through the world in proverbial sentences.

“ I have found it remarked that, in this important sentence, ‘ Go before, I’ll follow,’ we read a translation of ‘ I prae, sequar.’ I have been told that when Caliban, after a pleasing dream, says, ‘ I cried to sleep again,’ the author imitates Anacreon, who had, like every other man, the same wish on the same occasion.

“ There are a few passages which may pass for

imitations, but so few, that the exception only confirms the rule ; he obtains them from accidental quotations, or by oral communication ; and, as he used what he had, would have used more if he had obtained it.

“ The Comedy of Errors is confessedly taken from the ‘ Menæchmi ’ of Plautus ; from the only play of Plautus which was then in English. What can be more probable than that he who copied that would have copied more, but that those which were not translated were inaccessible ?

“ Whether he knew the modern languages is uncertain. That his plays have some French scenes proves but little ; he might easily procure them to be written, and probably, even though he had known the language in the common degree, he could not have written it without assistance. In the story of Romeo and Juliet he is observed to have followed the English translation, where it deviates from the Italian ; but this, on the other part, proves nothing against his knowledge of the original. He was to copy, not what he knew himself, but what was known to his audience.

“ It is most likely that he had learned Latin sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the Roman authors. Concerning his skill in modern languages I can find no sufficient ground of determination ; but as no imitations of French or Italian authors have been discovered, though the Italian poetry was then high in esteem, I am

inclined to believe that he read little more than English, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated.

“ That much knowledge is scattered over his works is very justly observed by Pope, but it is often such knowledge as books did not supply. He that will understand Shakspeare must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop.

“ There is however proof enough that he was a very diligent reader ; nor was our language then so indigent of books but that he might very liberally indulge his curiosity without excursion into foreign literature. Many of the Roman authors were translated, and some of the Greek ; the Reformation had filled the kingdom with theological learning ; most of the topics of human disquisition had found English writers ; and poetry had been cultivated, not only with diligence, but success. This was a stock of knowledge sufficient for a mind so capable of appropriating and improving it.

“ But the greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius. He found the English stage in a state of the utmost rudeness ; no essays either in tragedy or comedy had appeared, from which it could be discovered to what degree of delight either one or other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue were yet

understood. Shakspeare may be truly said to have introduced them both amongst us, and in some of his happier scenes to have carried them both to the utmost height.

“By what gradations of improvement he proceeded is not easily known ; for the chronology of his works is yet unsettled. Rowe is of opinion that ‘perhaps we are not to look for his beginning, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works ; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that, for aught I know,’ says he, ‘the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, were the best.’ But the power of nature is only the power of using to any certain purpose the materials which diligence procures, or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge, and, when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. Shakspeare, however favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned ; and as he must increase his ideas, like other mortals, by gradual acquisition, he, like them, grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficacy as he was himself more amply instructed.

“There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer ; from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. Shakspeare must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in

the highest degree curious and attentive. Other writers borrow their characters from preceding writers, and diversify them only by the accidental appendages of present manners; the dress is a little varied, but the body is the same. Our author had both matter and form to provide; for, except the characters of Chaucer, to whom I think he is not much indebted, there were no writers in English, and perhaps not many in other modern languages, which showed life in its native colours.

“ The contest about the original benevolence or malignity of man had not yet commenced. Speculation had not yet attempted to analyse the mind, to trace the passions to their sources, to unfold the seminal principles of vice and virtue, or sound the depths of the heart for the motives of action. All those inquiries which, from that time that human nature became the fashionable study, have been made, sometimes with nice discernment, but often with idle subtlety, were yet unattempted. The tales with which the infancy of learning was satisfied exhibited only the superficial appearances of action, related the events, but omitted the causes, and were formed for such as delighted in wonders rather than in truth. Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet; he that would know the world was under the necessity of gleaning his own remarks, by mingling as he could in its business and amusements.

“ Boyle congratulated himself upon his high birth, because it favoured his curiosity, by facilitating his access. Shakspeare had no such advantage ; he came to London a needy adventurer, and lived for a time by very mean employments. Many works of genius and learning have been performed in states of life that appear very little favourable to thought or to inquiry ; so many, that he who considers them is inclined to think that he sees enterprise and perseverance predominating over all external agency, and bidding help and hinderance vanish before them. The genius of Shakspeare was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty, nor limited by the narrow conversation to which men in want are inevitably condemned ; the encumbrances of his fortune were shaken from his mind, ‘ as dew-drops from a lion’s mane.’

“ Though he had so many difficulties to encounter, and so little assistance to surmount them, he has been able to maintain an exact knowledge of many modes of life and many casts of native dispositions ; to vary them with great multiplicity ; to mark them by nice distinctions ; and to show them in full view by proper combinations. In this part of his performances he had none to imitate, but has himself been imitated by all succeeding writers ; and it may be doubted whether from all his successors more maxims of theoretical knowledge, or more rules of practical prudence, can

be collected, than he alone has given to his country.

“ Nor was his attention confined to the actions of men ; he was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world ; his descriptions have always some peculiarities, gathered by contemplating things as they really exist. It may be observed that the oldest poets of many nations preserve their reputation, and that the following generations of wit, after a short celebrity, sink into oblivion. The first, whoever they be, must take their sentiments and descriptions immediately from knowledge ; the resemblance is therefore just, their descriptions are verified by every eye, and their sentiments acknowledged by every breast. Those whom their fame invites to the same studies copy partly them, and partly nature, till the books of one age gain such authority as to stand in the place of nature to another, and imitation, always deviating a little, becomes at last capricious and casual. Shakspeare, whether life or nature be his subject, shows plainly that he has seen with his own eyes ; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind ; the ignorant feel his representations to be just, and the learned see that they are complete.

“ Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author, except Homer, who invented so much as Shakspeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty

upon his age or country. The form, the character, the language and the shows of the English drama are his. 'He seems,' says Dennis, 'to have been the very original of our English tragical harmony, that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trisyllable terminations. For the diversity distinguishes it from heroic harmony, and by bringing it nearer to common use makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose ; we make such verse in common conversation.'

"I know not whether this praise is rigorously just. The dissyllable termination, which the critic rightly appropriates to the drama, is to be found, though, I think, not in 'Gorboduc,' which is confessedly before our author, yet in 'Hieronymo,' of which the date is not certain, but which there is reason to believe at least as old as his earlier plays. This, however, is certain, that he is the first who taught either tragedy or comedy to please, there being no theatrical piece of any older writer, of which the name is known, except to antiquaries and collectors of books, which are sought because they are scarce, and would not have been scarce had they been much esteemed.

"To him we must ascribe the praise, unless Spenser may divide it with him, of having first discovered to how much smoothness and harmony the English language could be softened. He has

speeches, perhaps sometimes scenes, which have all the delicacy of Rowe, without his effeminacy. He endeavours indeed commonly to strike by the force and vigour of his dialogue, but he never executes his purpose better than when he tries to soothe by softness.

“ Yet it must be at last confessed that, as we owe everything to him, he owes something to us ; that if much of his praise is paid by perception and judgment, much is likewise given by custom and veneration. We fix our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what we should in another loathe and despise. If we endured without praising, respect for the father of our drama might excuse us ; but I have seen, in the book of some modern critic, a collection of anomalies, which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation, but which his admirer has accumulated as a monument of honour.

“ He has scenes of undoubted and perpetual excellence, but perhaps not one play which, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion. I am indeed far from thinking that his works were wrought to his own ideas of perfection ; when they were such as would satisfy the audience, they satisfied the writer. It is seldom that authors, though more studious of fame than Shakspeare, rise much above the standard of their own age ; to add a little to what is best will always be sufficient for present praise, and

those who find themselves exalted into fame are willing to credit their encomiasts, and to spare the labour of contending with themselves."

It was observed by Warburton, in 1747, that the fit criticism for Shakspeare was not such "as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu have collected from antiquity ; and of which such kind of writers as Rymer, Gildon, Dennis, and Oldmixon, have only gathered and chewed the husks." But he goes on to infer that "crude and superficial judgments on books and things" had taken the place of the older mechanical criticism ; and that there was "a deluge of the worst sort of critical jargon — *that which looks most like sense.*" The rules of art, as they were called, having been rejected as inapplicable to Shakspeare, a swarm of writers arose who considered that he was to be judged without the application of any general principles at all. They held that he wrote without a system ; that the absence of this system produced his excellences and his faults ; that his absurdities were as striking as his beauties ; that he was the most careless and hasty of writers ; and that therefore it was the business of all grave and discreet critics to warn the unenlightened multitude against his blunders, his contradictions, his violations of sense and decency. This was the critical *school of individual judgment*, which has lasted for more than a century amongst us ; and which, to our minds, is a far more corrupting thing than the pedantries

of all the Gildons and Dennis's who have eat paper and drunk ink. Before the publication of Johnson's preface (which being of a higher order of composition than what had previously been produced upon Shakspeare, *seemed* to establish fixed rules for opinion), the impertinencies which were poured out by the feeblest minds upon Shakspeare's merits and demerits surpass all ordinary belief. Mrs. Charlotte Lennox, in whose "*Shakespear Illustrated*" Johnson himself is reputed to have had some hand, is an average specimen of the insolence of that critical jargon "which looks most like sense." This work was published in 1753. A passage or two will show the sort of style in which this high-priestess of criticism delivered her oracles:—

Romeo and Juliet.—"Shakespear makes Romeo, in the midst of his affliction for the death of his wife, and while the horrible design of killing himself was forming in his mind, give a ludicrous detail of the miserable furniture of a poor apothecary's shop; a description, however beautiful in itself, is here so ill-timed and so inconsistent with the condition and circumstances of the speaker, that we cannot help being shocked at the absurdity."

Cymbeline.—"It would be an endless task to take notice of all the absurdities in the plot, and unnatural manners in the characters, of this play. . . . The whole conduct of the play is absurd and ridiculous to the last degree; and with

all the liberties Shakespear has taken with time, place, and action, the story, as he has managed it, is more improbable than a fairy tale."

The Winter's Tale. — "It has been mentioned, as a great praise to Shakespear, that the old paltry story of 'Dorastus and Fawnia' served him for *A Winter's Tale*; but if we compare the conduct of the incidents in the play with the paltry story on which it is founded, we shall find the original much less absurd and ridiculous. . . . The novel has nothing in it half so low and improbable as this contrivance of the statue; and, indeed, wherever Shakespear has altered or invented, his *Winter's Tale* is greatly inferior to the old paltry story that furnished him with the subject of it."

Hamlet. — "The violation of poetical justice is not the only fault that arises from the death of Hamlet; the revenging his father's murder is the sole end of all his designs, and the great business of the play; and the noble and fixed resolution of Hamlet to accomplish it makes up the most shining part of his character; yet this great end is delayed till after Hamlet is mortally wounded. He stabs the king immediately upon the information of his treachery to himself. Thus his revenge becomes interested, and he seems to punish his uncle rather for his own death than the murder of the king his father."

Richard II. — "This play affords several other instances in which Shakespear's inattention to the

history is plainly proved ; and is therefore the less pardonable, as the subject of it is not one entire action, wrought up with a variety of beautiful incidents, which at once delight and instruct the mind, but a dramatic narration of historical facts, and a successive series of actions and events, which are only interesting as they are true, and only pleasing as they are gracefully told."

Henry VIII.—"The fate of this Queen, or that of Cardinal Wolsey, each singly afforded a subject for tragedy. Shakespear, by blending them in the same piece, has destroyed the unity of his fable ; divided our attention between them ; and, by adding many other unconnected incidents, all foreign to his design, has given us an irregular historical drama, instead of a finished tragedy."

Much Ado about Nothing.—"This fable, absurd and ridiculous as it is, was drawn from the foregoing story, 'Genevra,' in Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso,'—a fiction which, as it is managed by the epic poet, is neither improbable nor unnatural ; but by Shakespear mangled and defaced, full of inconsistencies, contradictions, and blunders. The defaming a lady, by means of her servant personating her at her chamber-window, is the subject pursued by both. Shakespear, by changing the persons, altering some of the circumstances, and inventing others, has made the whole an improbable contrivance ; borrowed just enough to show his poverty of invention, and added enough to prove his want of judgment."

Nothing can be a greater proof of the advance of *some* critical knowledge amongst us than the shuddering with which all persons of decent information now regard such utter trash. Mrs. Lennox was evidently a very small-minded person attempting to form a judgment upon a very high subject. But it was not only the small minds which uttered such babble in the last century. Samuel Johnson himself, in some of his critical opinions upon individual plays, is not very far above the good lady whom he patronised. What shall we think of the prosaic approbation of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*? — “Wild and fantastical as this play is, all the parts in their various modes are well written.” What of his praise of *Romeo and Juliet*? — “His comic scenes are happily wrought, but his pathetic strains are always polluted with some unexpected depravations.” What of the imputed omissions in *As You Like It*? — “By hastening to the end of this work Shakspeare suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit, and lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers.” What of the pompous seesawing about *Macbeth*? — “It has no nice discriminations of character. The danger of ambition is well described. The passions are directed to the true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested; and though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet

every reader rejoices at his fall." What, lastly, shall we say to the bow-wow about Cymbeline? — "To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility—upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation." All that we can in truth say of these startling things is this—that this learned, sensible, sometimes profound, and really great man, having trampled upon the unities and other tests of poetical merit, the fashion of Dryden's age, but not of his own, is perpetually groping about in the mists of his private judgment, now pursuing a glimmering of light, now involved in outer darkness. This system of criticism upon Shakspeare was rotten to the foundation. It was based upon an extension and a misapplication of Ben Jonson's dogmatic assertion—"He wanted art." The art of Shakspeare was not revealed to the critics of the last century. Let us hear one to whom the principles of this art were revealed:—"It is a painful truth, that not only individuals, but even whole nations, are oftentimes so enslaved to the habits of their education and immediate circumstances, as not to judge disinterestedly even on those subjects the very pleasure arising from which consists in its disinterestedness, namely, on subjects of taste and polite literature. Instead of deciding con-

cerning their own modes and customs by any rule of reason, nothing appears rational, becoming, or beautiful to them but what coincides with the peculiarities of their education. In this narrow circle individuals may attain to exquisite discrimination, as the French critics have done in their own literature; but a true critic can no more be such, without placing himself on some central point, from which he may command the whole,—that is, some general rule, which, founded in reason, or the faculties common to all men, must therefore apply to each,—than an astronomer can explain the movements of the solar system without taking his stand in the sun.”* Samuel Johnson proposes to inquire, in the preface before us, “by what peculiarities of excellence Shakspeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.” He answers the question at considerable length, by displaying what he holds to be the great peculiarity of his excellence:—“Shakspeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. . . . This, therefore, is the praise of Shakspeare—that his drama is the mirror of life.” Such is the leading idea of the critic. He sees nothing higher in Shakspeare than an exhibition of the *real*. “He who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers

* Coleridge’s “Literary Remains,” vol. ii. p. 63.

raise up before him may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language ; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions." When Johnson is unable to trace this actual picture of life in Shakspeare, when he perceives any deviations from the regular " transactions of the world," or the due " progress of the passions," then he is bewildered ; and he generally ends in blaming his author. The characteristic excellence, he says, of the tragedy of Hamlet is " variety." According to his notion that in all Shakspeare's dramas we find " an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time and exhilarated at another," he holds, that " the pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth." But, in the conduct of the plot, the business of life and the course of the passions do not proceed with the regularity which he desires : — " Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause. . . . Hamlet is, through the whole piece, rather an instrument than an agent. After he has by the stratagem of the play convicted the king, he makes no attempt to punish him. . . . The catastrophe is not very happily produced." Where is the mistake in all this ? It is in taking a very limited view of the object and scope of Art. " It is its object and aim to bring within the

circle of our senses, perceptions, and emotions, everything which has existence in the mind of man. Art should realize in us the well-known saying, *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. Its appointed aim is, to awake and give vitality to all slumbering feelings, affections, and passions ; to fill and expand the heart ; and to make man, whether developed or undeveloped, feel in every fibre of his being *all* that human nature can endure, experience, and bring forth in her innermost and most secret recesses — *all* that has power to move and arouse the heart of man in its profoundest depths, manifold capabilities, and various phases ; to garner up for our enjoyment whatever, in the exercise of thought and imagination, the mind discovers of high and intrinsic merit, the grandeur of the lofty, the eternal, and the true, and present it to our feeling and contemplation. In like manner, to make pain and sorrow, and even vice and wrong, become clear to us ; to bring the heart into immediate acquaintance with the awful and the terrible, as well as with the joyous and pleasurable ; and lastly, to lead the fancy to hover gently, dreamily, on the wing of imagination, and entice her to revel in the seductive witchery of its voluptuous emotion and contemplation. Art should employ this manifold richness of its subject-matter to supply on the one hand the deficiencies of our actual experience of external life, and on the other hand to excite in us those passions which

shall cause the actual events of life to move us more deeply, and awaken our susceptibility for receiving impressions of all kinds." *

This is something higher than Johnson's notion of Shakspeare's art—higher as that notion was than the mechanical criticism of the age which preceded him. But the inconsistencies into which the critic is betrayed show the narrowness and weakness of his foundations. The drama of Shakspeare is "a mirror of life;" and yet, according to the critic, it is the great sin of Shakspeare that he is perpetually violating "poetical justice." Thus Johnson says in the preface, "He makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance." Johnson could not have avoided seeing that, if Shakspeare had not carried his persons "indifferently through right and wrong," he would not have exhibited "the real state of sublunary nature." But there was something much higher that Shakspeare would not then have done. Had he gone upon the principle of teaching an impracticable and therefore an unnatural theory of rewards and punishments in human

* We quote this from a very able article in the "British and Foreign Review," on Hegel's "Æsthetics." The passage is Hegel's.

affairs, if he had not intended that "his precepts and axioms" *should* "drop casually from him," he would have lost his supereminent power of gradually raising the mind into a comprehension of what belongs to the spiritual part of our nature; of exciting a deep sympathy with strong emotion and lofty passion; of producing an expansion of the heart, which embraces all the manifestations of human goodness and human sorrow; and, what is more, which penetrates into the abysses of guilt and degradation, and shows that there is no true peace, and no real resting-place, for what separates us from our fellow-men and from our God. This is not to be effected by didactic precepts *not* dropped casually; by false representations of the course of worldly affairs and the workings of man's secret heart. The mind comprehends the *whole* truth, when it is elevated by the art of the poet into a fit state for its comprehension. The *whole* moral purpose is then evolved, through a series of deductions in the mind of him who is thus moved. This is the highest logic, because it is based upon the broadest premises. Rymer sneers at Shakspeare when he says that the moral of Othello is, that maidens of quality should not run away with blackamoors. The sarcasm only tells upon those who demand any literal moral in a high work of art.

Because Johnson only saw in Shakspeare's dramas "a mirror of life," he prefers his comedy to his tragedy. "His tragedy seems to be skill, his

comedy to be instinct." When the poet is working with grander materials than belong to the familiar scenes of life, however natural and universal, the critic does not see that the region of literal things is necessarily abandoned — that skill must be more manifest in its effects. We are then in a world of higher reality than every-day reality. "In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study what is written at last with little felicity." This now strikes the most superficial student of Shakspeare as monstrous. We open "Irene," and we understand it. "He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting for the sake of those which are more easy." It is a great privilege of the art of Shakspeare, that in his most tragical scenes he never takes us out of the region of pleasurable emotions. It was his higher art, as compared with the lower art of Otway. He does reject "those exhibitions which would be more affecting," but not "for the sake of those which are more easy." Let any one try which is the more easy, "to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop," as Charles Lamb describes the tragic art of Webster; or to make a Desdemona, amidst the indignities which are heaped upon her, and the fears which subdue her soul, move tranquilly in an atmo-

sphere of poetical beauty, thinking of the maid that

“ had a song of — willow ;
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it.”

It is a rude conception which Johnson has of Shakspeare's art, when he says of the play of Hamlet, “ The scenes are interchangeably diversified with merriment and solemnity. . . . The pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth; the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness; and every personage produces the effect intended.” True. But it was no intended effect of the madness of Hamlet to cause “ much mirth.” Every word that Hamlet utters has something in it which sounds the depths of our intellectual being, because every word is consistent with his own character, which, of all poetical creations, sends us most to search into the mysteries of our own individual natures. This, if we understand it aright, is *poetry*. But Johnson says, “ Voltaire expresses his wonder that our author's extravagances are endured by a nation which has seen the tragedy of ‘ Cato.’ ” Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakspeare of men. We find in ‘ Cato ’ innumerable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions ; we place it with the fairest and noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunc-

tion with learning ; but Othello is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation, impregnated with genius." If Addison speaks "the language of poets," properly so called, "Cato" is poetry. If Shakspeare speaks the language of men, as distinct from the language of poets, Othello is *not* poetry. It needs no further argument to show that the critic has a false theory of the poetical art. He has here narrowed the question to an absurdity.

We may observe, from what Johnson says of "the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire," that the English critics fancied that, doing Shakspeare ample justice themselves, they were called upon to defend him from the mistaken criticisms of a foreign school. Every Englishman, from the period of Johnson, who has fancied himself absolved from the guilt of not admiring and understanding Shakspeare has taken up a stone to cast at Voltaire. Those who speak of Voltaire as an ignorant and tasteless calumniator of Shakspeare forget that his hostility was based upon a system of art which he conceived, and rightly so, was opposed to the system of Shakspeare. He had been bred up in the school of Corneille and Racine, the glories of his countrymen ; and it is really a remarkable proof of the vigour of his mind that he tolerated so much as he did in Shakspeare, and admired so much ; in this respect going farther perhaps than many of our own countrymen of no mean

reputation, such as Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke in 1730. In his “Discourse on Tragedy,” prefixed to “Brutus,” and addressed to Bolingbroke in that year, he says, “Not being able, my lord, to risk upon the French stage verses without rhyme, such as are the usage of Italy and of England, I have at least desired to transport to our scene certain beauties of yours. It is true, and I avow it, that the English theatre is very faulty. *I have heard from your mouth that you have not a good tragedy.* But in compensation you have some admirable scenes in these very monstrous pieces. Until the present time almost all the tragic authors of your nation have wanted that purity, that regular conduct, those *bienséances* of action and style, that elegance, and all those refinements of art, which have established the reputation of the French theatre since the great Corneille. But the most irregular of your pieces have one grand merit—it is that of *action*.” In the same letter we have his opinion of Shakspeare, which is certainly not that of a cold critic, but of one who admired even where he could not approve, and blamed as we had been accustomed to blame:—“With what pleasure have I seen in London your tragedy of Julius Cæsar, which for a hundred and fifty years has been the delight of your nation! I assuredly do not pretend to approve the barbarous irregularities with which it abounds. It is only astonishing that one finds not more of them in a work composed in

an age of ignorance, by a man who even knew not Latin, and who had no master but his own genius. But in the midst of so many gross faults, with what ravishment have I seen Brutus," &c. All this is perfectly intelligible, and demands no harsher censure than we have a right to apply to Dryden, who says nearly as strong things, and writes most of his own tragedies in the spirit of a devoted worshipper of the French school. In 1761, some thirty years after his letter to Bolingbroke, Voltaire writes "An Essay on the English Theatre," in which he expresses the wonder, which Johnson notices, that the nation which has "Cato" can endure Shakspeare. In this essay he gives a long analysis of Hamlet, in which, without attempting to penetrate at all into the real idea of that drama, he gives such an account of the plot as may exaggerate what he regards as its absurdities. He then says, "We cannot have a more forcible example of the difference of taste among nations. Let us, after this, speak of the rules of Aristotle, and the three unities, and the *bienséances*, and the necessity of never leaving the scene empty, and that no person should go out or come in without a sensible reason. Let us talk, after this, of the artful arrangement of the plot and its natural development; of the expressions being simple and noble; of making princes speak with the decency which they always have, or ought to have; of never violating the rules of language.

It is clear that a whole nation may be enchanted without giving oneself such trouble." No one can be more consistent than Voltaire in the expression of his opinions. It is not the individual judgment of the man betraying him into a doubtful or varying tone, but his uniform theory of the poetical art, which directs all his censure of Shakspeare; and which therefore makes his admiration, such as it is, of more value than the vague homage of those who, despising, or affecting to despise, Voltaire's system, have embraced no system of their own, and thus infallibly come to be more dogmatical, more supercilious, in their abuse, and more creeping in their praise, than the most slavish disciple of a school wholly opposed to Shakspeare, but consecrated by time, by high example, and by national opinion. The worst things which Voltaire has said of Shakspeare are conceived in this spirit, and therefore ought not in truth to offend Shakspeare's warmest admirers. "He had a genius full of power and fruitfulness, of the natural and the sublime"—this is the praise. The dispraise is linked to it:—"Without the least spark of good taste, and without the slightest knowledge of rules." We may dissent from this, but it is not fair to quarrel with it. He then goes on:—"I will say a hazardous thing, but true, that the merit of this author has ruined the English theatre. There are so many fine scenes, so many grand and terrible passages spread through

his monstrous farces which they call tragedies, that his pieces have always been represented with extreme success.”* We smile at the man’s power of ridicule when he travesties a plot of Shakspeare, as in the dissertation prefixed to “Semiramis.” But his object is so manifest—that of the elevation of his own theory of art—that he cannot outrage us. For what is his conclusion? That Shakspeare would have been a perfect poet if he had lived in the time of Addison.†

The famous “Letter to the Academy,” in 1776, was the crowning effort of Voltaire’s hostility to Shakspeare. In that year was announced a complete translation of Shakspeare; and several of the plays were published as a commencement of the undertaking. France, according to Grimm, was in a ferment.‡ The announcement of this translation appears to have enraged Voltaire. It said that Shakspeare was the creator of the sublime art of the theatre, which received from his hands existence and perfection; and, what was personally offensive, it added that Shakspeare was unknown in France, or, rather, disfigured. Voltaire tells the Academy that *he* was the first who made Shakspeare known in France, by the translation of some of his passages; that he had translated, too, the Julius Cæsar. But he is

* Lettres Philosophiques. Lettre 18.

† Dictionnaire Philosophique.

‡ Correspondance, 3^{me} partie, tome 1^{re}.

indignant that the new translators would sacrifice France to England, in paying no homage to the great French dramatists, whose pieces are acted throughout Europe. He notices, then, the four plays which they have translated ; and calls upon them, of course in his tone of exaggeration and ridicule, to render faithfully certain passages which they have slurred over. But Voltaire avows the support which he receives from the English themselves in his condemnation of what he holds to be the absurdities of Shakspeare, quoting from Marmontel in this matter : — “ The English have learned to correct and abridge Shakspeare. Garrick has banished from his scene the Gravediggers in Hamlet, and has omitted nearly all the fifth act.” Voltaire then adds, — “ The translator agrees not with this truth ; he takes the part of the gravediggers ; he would preserve them as a respectable monument of an unique genius.” The critic then gives a scene of “ *Bajazet*,” contrasting it with the opening scene of Romeo and Juliet. “ It is for you,” he says to the Academicians, “ to decide which method we ought to follow—that of Shakspeare, the god of tragedy, or of Racine.” In a similar way he contrasts a passage in Corneille and Lear : — “ Let the Academicians judge if the nation which has produced ‘ *Iphigénie*’ and ‘ *Athalie*’ ought to abandon them, to behold men and women strangled upon the stage, street-porters, sorcerers, buffoons, and drunken priests—if our

court, so long renowned for its politeness and its taste, ought to be changed into an alehouse and a wine-shop." In this letter to the Academy Voltaire loses his temper and his candour. He is afraid to risk any admiration of Shakspeare. But this intolerance is more intelligible than the apologies of Shakspeare's defenders in England. We must confess that we have more sympathy with Voltaire's earnest attack upon Shakspeare than with Mrs. Montagu's maudlin defence. Take a specimen:—"Our author, by following minutely the chronicles of the times, has embarrassed his dramas with too great a number of persons and events. The hurly-burly of these plays recommended them to a rude, illiterate audience, who, as he says, loved a noise of targets. His poverty, and the low condition of the stage (which at that time was not frequented by persons of rank), obliged him to this complaisance; and, unfortunately, he had not been tutored by any rules of art, or informed by acquaintance with just and regular dramas."* She gives a speech of Lear, and says, "Thus it is that Shakspeare redeems the nonsense, the indecorums, the irregularities of his plays." Again, in her criticism on Macbeth:—"Our author is too much addicted to the obscure bombast much affected by all sorts of writers in that age. . . . There are many bombast speeches in the tragedy of Macbeth, and these are the lawful prize of the critic." The exhibition

* Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakspeare.

of the fickle humour of the mob in Julius Cæsar is not to be “entirely condemned.” “The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius does not, by any means, deserve the ridicule thrown upon it by the French critic : but it rather retards than brings forward the catastrophe, and is useful only in setting Brutus in a good light.” One more extract from Mrs. Montagu, and we have done : — “It has been demonstrated with great ingenuity and candour that he was destitute of learning : the age was rude and void of taste ; but what had a still more pernicious influence on his works was, that the court and the universities, the statesmen and scholars, affected a scientific jargon. An obscurity of expression was thought the veil of wisdom and knowledge ; and that mist, common to the morn and eve of literature, which in fact proves it is not at its high meridian, was affectedly thrown over the writings, and even the conversation of the learned, who often preferred images distorted or magnified, to a simple exposition of their thoughts. Shakspeare is never more worthy of the true critic’s censure than in those instances in which he complies with this false pomp of manner. It was pardonable in a man of his rank not to be more polite and delicate than his contemporaries ; but we cannot so easily excuse such superiority of talents for stooping to any affectation.” This half-patronising, half-vindicating tone is very well meant ; and we respect Mrs. Montagu for coming

forward to break a lance with the great European critic; but the very celebrity of Shakspeare's "fair warrior" is one of the proofs that there was no real school of criticism amongst us.

Apologies for Shakspeare, lamentations over his defects, explanations of the causes of them, rude age, unlettered audience, the poet himself working without knowledge, — all this the invariable language of the English critics, is eagerly laid hold of, not only to justify the hostility of Voltaire, but to perpetuate the reign of a system altogether opposed to the system of Shakspeare, up to the present hour. M. Villemain, in the new edition of his "Essay upon Shakspeare," published in 1839, gives us as much interjectional eulogy of our national poet as might satisfy the most eager appetite of those admirers who think such praise worth anything. The French critic, of nearly a century later than Voltaire, holds that Shakspeare has no other system than his genius. It is in this chaos that we must seek his splendour. His absurdities, his buffooneries, belong to the gross theatre of his period. In judging Shakspeare we must reject the mass of barbarism and false taste with which he is surcharged. But then, apart from any system, "*quelle passion ! quelle poésie ! quelle éloquence !*" "This rude and barbarous genius discovers an unknown delicacy in the development of his female characters." And why ? "The taste which is so often missing in him is here supplied by a delicate instinct, which

makes him even anticipate what was wanting to the civilization of his time." The critic reposes somewhat on English authority :— " Mrs. Montagu has repelled the contempt of Voltaire by a judicious criticism of some defects of the French theatre, but she cannot palliate the enormous extravagances of the pieces of Shakspeare. Let us not forget, she says, that these pieces were played in a miserable inn before an unlettered audience, scarcely emerging out of barbarism." * But Mrs. Montagu is not alone in this. Others, as angry with Voltaire, as prodigal of their admiration of Shakspeare, quietly surrender what Voltaire really attacks, forgetting that his praises have been nearly as strong, and sometimes a little more judicious, than their own. Hear Martin Sherlock apostrophizing Shakspeare :—

" Always therefore study Nature.

" It is she who was thy book, O Shakspeare ; it is she who was thy study day and night ; it is she from whom thou hast drawn those beauties which are at once the glory and delight of thy nation. Thou wert the eldest son, the darling child, of nature ; and, like thy mother, enchanting, astonishing, sublime, graceful, thy variety is inexhaustible. Always original, always new, thou art the only prodigy which Nature has produced. Homer was the first of men, but thou art more than man. The reader who thinks this eulogium

* Essai sur Shakspeare, Paris, 1839.

extravagant is a stranger to my subject. To say that Shakspeare had the imagination of Dante, and the depth of Machiavel, would be a weak encomium : he had them, and more. To say that he possessed the terrible graces of Michael Angelo, and the amiable graces of Correggio, would be a weak encomium : he had them, and more. To the brilliancy of Voltaire he added the strength of Demosthenes ; and to the simplicity of La Fontaine, the majesty of Virgil. — But, say you, we have never seen such ‘a being.’ You are in the right ; Nature made it, and broke the mould.”

This is the first page of “A Fragment on Shakspeare” (1786). The following is an extract from the last page : — “The only view of Shakspeare was to make his fortune, and for that it was necessary to fill the playhouse. At the same time that he caused a duchess to enter the boxes, he would cause her servants to enter the pit. The people have always money ; to make them spend it, they must be diverted ; and Shakspeare forced his sublime genius to stoop to the gross taste of the populace, as Sylla jested with his soldiers.”

David Hume, the most popular historian of England, thus writes of Shakspeare : — “Born in a rude age and educated in the lowest manner, without any instruction either from the world or from books.” The consequence of this national and individual ignorance was a necessary one : — “A reasonable propriety of thought he cannot

for any time uphold." What right have we to abuse Voltaire, when we hear this from an English writer of the same period? We fully agree with Schlegel in this matter:—"That foreigners, and Frenchmen in particular, who frequently speak in the most strange language of antiquity and the middle ages, as if cannibalism had been first put an end to in Europe by Louis XIV., should entertain this opinion of Shakspeare, might be pardonable; but that Englishmen should adopt such a calumnation of that glorious epoch of their history, in which the foundation of their greatness was laid, is to me incomprehensible."*

But it is not wholly incomprehensible. Schlegel has in part explained it:—"I have elsewhere examined into the pretensions of modern cultivation, as it is called, which looks down with such contempt on all preceding ages. I have shown that it is all little, superficial, and unsubstantial at bottom. The pride of what has been called the present maturity of human reason has come to a miserable end; and the structures erected by those pedagogues of the human race have fallen to pieces like the baby-houses of children." So far, of the critical contempt of the age of Shakspeare. Schlegel again, with equal truth, lays bare the real character of the same critical opinions of the poet himself:—"It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time

* Lectures on Dramatic Literature, Black's Translation.

which preceded our own, a tendency displayed also in physical science, to consider what is possessed of life as a mere accumulation of dead parts ; to separate what exists only in connexion and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central point, and viewing all the parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence, nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the contemplation of an extensive work of art. Shakspeare's compositions, from the very depth of purpose displayed in them, have been exposed to the misfortune of being misunderstood. Besides, this prosaical species of criticism applies always the poetical form to the details of execution ; but, in so far as the plan of the piece is concerned, it never looks for more than the logical connexion of causes and effects, or some partial and trivial moral by way of application ; and all that cannot be reconciled to this is declared a superfluous, or even a detrimental, addition. On these principles we must equally strike out most of the choral songs of the Greek tragedies, which also contribute nothing to the development of the action, but are merely an harmonious echo of the impression aimed at by the poet. In this they altogether mistake the rights of poetry and the nature of the romantic drama, which, for the very reason that it is and ought to be picturesque, requires richer accompaniments and contrasts for its main groups. In all art and poetry, but more especially in the

romantic, the fancy lays claim to be considered as an independent mental power governed according to its own laws."

The translation of Schlegel's work in 1815, in conjunction with the admirable lectures of Coleridge, gave a new direction amongst the thinking few to our national opinion of Shakspeare. Other critics of a higher school than our own race of commentators had preceded Schlegel in Germany; and it would be perhaps not too much to say that, as the reverent study of Shakspeare has principally formed their æsthetic school, so that æsthetic school has sent us back to the reverent study of Shakspeare. He lived in the hearts of the people, who knew nothing of the English critics. The learned, as they were called, understood him least. Let the lovers of truth rejoice that their despotism is over.

CHAPTER VI.

THE history of critical opinion upon Shakspeare, in England, has now brought us to what may be called the second race of commentators.

The English editors of Shakspeare have certainly brought to their task a great variety of qualities, from which combination we might expect some very felicitous results. They divide themselves into two schools, which, like all schools, have their subdivisions. Rowe, Pope, Theobald,

Hanmer, Johnson, belong to the school which did not seek any very exact acquaintance with our early literature, and which probably would have despised the exhibition, if not the reality, of antiquarian and bibliographical knowledge. A new school arose, whose acquaintance with what has been called black-letter literature was extensive enough to produce a decided revolution in Shakspearean commentary. Capell, Steevens, Malone, Reed, Douce, are the representatives of the later school. The first school contained the most brilliant men ; the second, the most painstaking commentators. The dullest of the first school, — a name hung up amongst the dunces by his rival editor, — poor, “ piddling Tibbald,” was unquestionably the best of the first race of editors. Rowe was indolent ; Pope, flashy ; Warburton, paradoxical ; Johnson, pedantic. Theobald brought his common sense to the task ; and has left us, we cannot avoid thinking, the best of all the conjectural emendations. Of the other school, the real learning, and sometimes sound judgment, of Capell, is buried in an obscurity of thought and style, — to say nothing of his comment being printed separately from his text, — which puts all ordinary reading for purposes of information at complete defiance. Of Steevens and Malone, they have had, more or less, the glory of having linked themselves to Shakspeare during the last half-century. Reed and Chalmers were mere supervisors and abridgers of what they did.

The edition of Capell was published in ten small octavo volumes, three years after that of Johnson—that is, in 1768. His preface is printed in what we call the variorum editions of Shakspeare, but Steevens has added to it this depreciating note:—“Dr. Johnson’s opinion of this performance may be known from the following passage in Mr. Boswell’s ‘Life of Dr. Johnson:’—‘If the man would have come to me, I would have endeavoured to endow his purpose with words, for, as it is, he doth gabble monstrously.’” Certainly “the man” does write a most extraordinary style; and it is impossible to do full justice to his edition, from the great bulk of the notes and various readings “being published in a separate form,” with references to previous editors so obscure and perplexed that few would take the trouble to attempt to reach his meaning. Capell was a man of fortune; and he devoted a life to this labour, dying in the midst of it. Steevens never mentions him but to insult him; and amongst the heaps of the most trashy notes that encumber the variorum editions, raked together from the pamphlets of every dabbler in commentary, there is perhaps not one single-minded quotation from Capell. John Collins, the publisher of his posthumous Notes and Various Readings, brings a charge against Steevens which may account for this unrelenting hostility to a learned and amiable man labouring in a pursuit common to them both. He says that Capell’s

edition "is made the groundwork of what is to pass for the genuine production of these combined editors" (Johnson and Steevens). This, he says, may be proved by a comparison of their first edition of 1773 with that of Johnson's of 1765, Capell's having been published during the interval. He then proceeds further in the charge:—"But the re-publication of their work, as it 'is revised and augmented,' makes further advances upon the same plan, abounding with fresh matter and accumulated evidence in proof of the industry with which the purloining trade has been pursued, and of the latitude to which it has been extended, in each of the above-mentioned particulars. For, differing as it does from its former self in numberless instances, in all of them it is still found to agree with that edition, which, we are gravely told in so many words by the apparent manager of the business, 'has not been examined beyond one play.'"

But there was another cause of the hostility of Steevens and his school of commentators. Farmer was their Coriphæus. Their souls were prostrate before the extent of his researches, in that species of literature which possesses this singular advantage for the cultivator, that, if he studies it in an original edition, of which only one or two copies are known to exist (the merit is gone if there is a baker's dozen known), he is immediately pronounced learned, judicious, laborious, acute. And this was Farmer's praise. He wrote "An Essay on

the Learning of Shakspeare," which has not one passage of solid criticism from the first page to the last, and from which, if the name and the works of Shakspeare were to perish, and one copy—an unique copy is the affectionate name for these things—could be miraculously preserved, the only inference from the book would be that William Shakspeare was a very obscure and ignorant man, whom some misjudging admirers had been desirous to exalt into an ephemeral reputation, and that Richard Farmer was a very distinguished and learned man, who had stripped the mask off the pretender. The first edition of Farmer's pamphlet appeared in 1767.

Capell, who had studied Shakspeare with far more accuracy than this mere pedant, who never produced any literary performance in his life except this arrogant pamphlet, held a contrary opinion to Farmer:—"It is our firm belief that Shakspeare was very well grounded, at least in Latin, at school. It appears, from the clearest evidence possible, that his father was a man of no little substance, and very well able to give him such education; which, perhaps, he might be inclined to carry further, by sending him to a university; but was prevented in this design (if he had it) by his son's early marriage, which, from monuments and other like evidence, it appears with no less certainty must have happened before he was seventeen, or very soon after: the displeasure of his father, which was the consequence

of this marriage, or else some excesses which he is said to have been guilty of, it is probable, drove him up to town ; where he engaged early in some of the theatres, and was honoured with the patronage of the Earl of Southampton : his *Venus and Adonis* is addressed to that Earl in a very pretty and modest dedication, in which he calls it ‘ the first heire of his invention ; ’ and ushers it to the world with this singular motto : —

“ *Vilia miretur vulgus, mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua ;* ”

and the whole poem, as well as his *Lucrece*, which followed it soon after, together with his choice of those subjects, are plain marks of his acquaintance with some of the Latin classics, at least, at that time. The dissipation of youth, and, when that was over, the busy scene in which he instantly plunged himself, may very well be supposed to have hindered his making any great progress in them ; but that such a mind as his should quite lose the tincture of any knowledge it had once been imbued with cannot be imagined : accordingly we see that this school-learning (for it was no more) stuck with him to the last ; and it was the recordations, as we may call it, of that learning which produced the Latin that is in many of his plays, and most plentifully in those that are the most early : every several piece of it is aptly introduced, given to a proper character, and uttered upon some proper occasion ; and so well cemented, as it were, and joined to the passage it stands in,

as to deal conviction to the judicious, that the whole was wrought up together, and fetched from his own little store, upon the sudden, and without study.

“The other languages which he has sometimes made use of—that is, the Italian and French—are not of such difficult conquest that we should think them beyond his reach. An acquaintance with the first of them was a sort of fashion in his time. Surrey and the sonnet-writers set it on foot, and it was continued by Sidney and Spenser: all our poetry issued from that school; and it would be wonderful indeed if he, whom we saw a little before putting himself with so much zeal under the banner of the Muses, should not have been tempted to taste at least of that fountain to which of all his other brethren there was such a continual resort: let us conclude, then, that he did taste of it; but, happily for himself, and more happy for the world that enjoys him now, he did not find it to his relish, and threw away the cup. Metaphor apart, it is evident that he had some knowledge of the Italian—perhaps just as much as enabled him to read a novel or a poem, and to put some few fragments of it, with which his memory furnished him, into the mouth of a pedant or fine gentleman.

“How or when he acquired it we must be content to be ignorant; but of the French language he was somewhat a greater master than of the two that have gone before; yet, unless we except their

novelists, he does not appear to have had much acquaintance with any of their writers ; what he has given us of it is merely colloquial, flows with great ease from him, and is reasonably pure. Should it be said he had travelled for it, we know not who can confute us."

The principle of Capell's edition, as described by himself in the title-page, was to give the plays of Shakspeare as "set out by himself in quarto, or by the players, his fellows, in folio." His introduction consists of an analysis of the value of these various authorities ; and he discriminates very justly between those plays in quarto which "have much resemblance to those in the folio," and those which were "first drafts or else imperfect and stolen copies." His text is formed upon this discriminating principle, not attaching an equal value to all the original copies in quarto, or superseding the text of the folio by thrusting in passages out of the first drafts and imperfect copies. To say that his text is the result invariably of a sound judgment would be to say too much ; and indeed some of his emendations approach a little to the ridiculous. But we have no hesitation in saying that it is a better text, because approaching more nearly to the originals, than that of many of those who came after him, and went on mending and mending for half a century till the world was tired with the din of their tinkering. The race which succeeded him was corrupted by flattery. Take a specimen :—"Shakspeare's felicity has

been rendered complete in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy : but some of the lighter characters were become illegible ; these have been restored by critics whose learning and penetration have traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced.* These critics had an accurate perception of part of their duty when they set out upon their work. The first labour of Steevens, which preceded the edition of Capell by two years, was to reprint in fac-simile “twenty of the plays of Shakspeare, being the whole number printed in quarto during his lifetime, or before the Restoration ; collated where there were different copies, and published from the originals.” Most accurately did he execute this laborious duty. We have collated, directly, or by the employment of persons upon whose care we could implicitly rely, these re-impressions by Steevens ; and, with the exception, upon an average, of half a dozen of the minutest deviations in each play, we are as well contented with our copy for all purposes of utility as if we possessed the rarest edition of the most self-satisfied collector. The two great public libraries of England, the British Museum and the Bodleian, possess all the originals. The next progressive movement of Steevens was still in the same safe path. He became united with Johnson in the edition of 1773. In his advertisement he says,—“The la-

* Mrs. Montagu :—Introduction.

bours of preceding editors have not left room for a boast that many valuable readings have been retrieved; though it may be fairly asserted that the text of Shakspeare is restored to the condition in which the author, or rather his first publishers, appear to have left it, such emendations as were absolutely necessary alone admitted." He defines what are absolutely necessary, such as a supply of particles when indispensable to the sense. He rejects with indignation all attempts to tamper with the text by introducing a syllable in aid of the metre. He declines suggestions of correspondents "that might have proved of great advantage to a more daring commentator." Upon such safe foundations was the edition of 1773 reared. In 1778 it was "revised and augmented," and in 1785 it was reprinted with additions by Isaac Reed, Steevens having declined the further care of the work. Steevens also in 1779 rendered an acceptable service to the students of our dramatic history, by the publication of "Six old plays, on which Shakspeare founded his Measure for Measure, Comedy of Errors, Taming the Shrew, King John, King Henry IV., King Henry V., and King Lear." In 1780 Malone appeared as an editor of Shakspeare. He came forward with "A Supplement" to the edition of 1778, in which he republished the poems of Shakspeare, and the seven doubtful plays which had been printed as his in the third and fourth folios. The encouragement which he had received induced

him, in 1790, when Steevens had retired from his editorial labours in connexion with the bookseller's edition, to publish a complete edition of his own, but which was still a variorum edition, "with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators." In this first appeared his "Dissertation on the Three Parts of Henry VI.," and his "Historical Account of the English Stage." Malone professes the same anxiety to adhere to the genuine text of Shakspeare as Steevens had professed before him ; but he opened a wide field for editorial licence, in his principle of making up a text out of the folio edition and the previous quartos ; and to add to the apparent value of his own labours, he exaggerated, as others have since done, the real value of these quartos : — "They *in general* are preferable to the exhibition of the same plays in the folio ; for this plain reason, because, instead of printing these plays from a manuscript, the editors of the folio, to save labour, or from some other motive, printed the greater part of them from the very copies which they represented as maimed and imperfect, and frequently from a late, instead of the earliest, edition ; in some instances with additions and alterations of their own." This is not an accurate statement of the question ; for the large additions to the folio copy when compared with the quartos, the careful emendations, and even the omissions, which are seldom without some sound apparent reason, could not have been the additions

and alterations of the editors of the folio, but must have been the result of the author's labours, perhaps during a series of years. We may with propriety in this place take a general view of the materials upon which a genuine text of Shakspeare must be founded.

“Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, published according to the True Originall Copies,” is the title of the first collection of our poet's plays, which appeared in a folio volume, in 1623. This volume is “printed by Isaac Iaggard and Ed. Blount;” but the Dedication bears the signatures of “John Heminge, Henry Condell.” That Blount and Jaggard had become the proprietors of this edition, we learn from an entry in the Stationers' registers, under date November 8. 1623; in which they claim “Mr. William Shakespeere's Comedyes, Histories, and Tragedyes, soe many of the said copies as are not formerly entered to other men.” These copies so claimed as not “formerly entered” are then recited. They are in number sixteen*; the whole volume con-

* Of the *eighteen* plays enumerated in pp. 226, 227. as first printed in the folio of 1623, as far as ascertained from any known edition, they claim *fifteen* — that is all, with the exception of “The Taming of the Shrew,” “King John,” and “Henry VI., Part I.” But they also claim “The Third Part of Henry VI.,” which had been previously printed, with very large differences, as “The Second Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster;” thus making *sixteen* as the number claimed as “not formerly entered.”

sisting of thirty-six plays. The plays “formerly entered to other men” had, with some exceptions, been previously published, each separately; and some of these went on to several editions, at dates extending from 1597 to 1622. These are what are commonly spoken of as the quarto editions. Before we proceed to an examination of the value of these editions, it may be well to see the mode in which they were regarded, or professed to be regarded, by the editors of the folio of 1623.

John Heminge and Henry Condell were amongst the “principal actors” of the plays of Shakspeare, according to a list prefixed to their edition. In 1608 they were shareholders with Shakspeare in the Blackfriars Theatre. In his Will, in 1616, they stand upon equal terms with his eminent friend Burbage, in the following bequest:—“To my fellows, John Hemyng, Richard Burbage, and Henry Condell, twenty-six shillings eight-pence apiece, to buy them rings.” In 1619, after the death of Shakspeare and Burbage, they were at the head of the remaining “fellows.” They are entitled, therefore, to speak with authority, and to be regarded with deference, both from their intimate connexion with Shakspeare, and the responsible position which they held in the company of actors of which his plays had probably become the most valuable possession. In their Dedication to the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Montgomery,

they allude to the favour with which these noble-men regarded these productions (which, in the dedicatory language, they call "trifles"), and "their author, living." They further say, "We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his orphans guardians, without ambition either of self-profit or fame; only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare." In their address "To the great variety of readers," the words which they use are still more remarkable:—"It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wished, that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings. But since it hath been ordained otherwise, and he, by death, departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his friends the office of their care and pain to have collected and published them; and so to have published them, as where, before, you were abused with divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed them,—even those are now offered to your view cured, and perfect of their limbs; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them; who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together; and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

That the friends, fellows, and editors of Shakspeare were held to perform an acceptable service to the world by this publication we may judge, however imperfectly, from some of the verses prefixed to the edition. Ben Jonson's celebrated poem, "To the Memory of my beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us," follows the preface, and it concludes with these lines:—

"Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheer the drooping stage;
Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn'd
 like night,
And despairs day, *but for thy volume's light.*"

Another poem in the same volume, by Leonard Digges, is in the same tone:—

"Shakespeare, at length *thy pious fellows give*
The world thy works; thy works by which outlive
Thy tomb thy name must. When that stone is rent,
And time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
Here we alive shall view thee still. *This look,*
When brass and marble fade, shall make thee look
Fresh to all ages."

We cannot doubt that the publication of this volume was hailed with delight by all readers of taste and judgment; and that, previous to the publication of the second edition, nine years after, hundreds of the countrymen of Shakspeare, as well as the young Milton, had become familiar with "the leaves" of that "unvalued book." For, if the edition of 1623 had no other claims upon the gratitude of every Englishman, it had secured

from that destruction, entire or partial, which would probably have been their fate if they had remained in manuscript, some of the noblest monuments of Shakspeare's genius. The poet had been dead seven years when this edition was printed. Some of the plays which it preserved, through the medium of the press, had been written a considerable period before his death. We have not a single manuscript line in existence, written, or supposed to be written, by Shakspeare. If, from any notions of exclusive advantage as the managers of a company, Heminge and Condell had not printed this edition of Shakspeare,—if the publication had been suspended for ten, or at most for fifteen years, till the civil wars broke out, and the predominance of the puritanical spirit had shut up the theatres,—the probability is that all Shakspeare's manuscripts would have perished. What then should we have lost, which will now remain when “brass and marble fade!” We will give the list of those plays which, as far as any edition is known, were printed for the first time in the folio of 1623:—

COMEDIES.

The Tempest.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Measure for Measure.

The Comedy of Errors.

As You Like It.

The Taming of the Shrew.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Twelfth Night.

The Winter's Tale.

HISTORIES.

King John.

Henry VI., Part I.

Henry VIII.

TRAGEDIES.

Coriolanus.

Timon of Athens.

Julius Cæsar.

Macbeth.

Antony and Cleopatra.

Cymbeline.

But the enumeration of these eighteen plays, which were printed for the first time in the folio of 1623, by no means represents the entire amount of the obligation to the editors of that collection. They have themselves spoken of “divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed them;” and they add, “even those are now offered to your view cured, and perfect of their limbs.” Without here entering into the question whether particular copies of the plays published before the folio of 1623 were “stolen and surreptitious,” we shall place before our readers the titles of those plays, which, in their original form, appear from some cause or other imperfect,—either “maimed or deformed,” or produced immaturely:—

The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Henry V.

The First Part of the Contention of The Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster. (Corresponding with Hen. VI., Part II.)

The Second Part of the Contention, &c. (Corresponding with Henry VI., Part III.)

Had these plays not been preserved in the folio of 1623, the previously existing copies

would have furnished us a very imperfect notion of the state in which the poet finally left them.

Putting, therefore, the eighteen plays first printed in the folio with the four plays there first printed in a perfect shape, we must come to the conclusion that, out of the thirty-six plays which that edition contains, the text of twenty-two must absolutely be founded on the text of Heminge and Condell. There is only one play which common consent has ascribed wholly, or in part, to Shakspeare, namely "Pericles," which is not included in the edition of 1623.

We have been somewhat minute in this enumeration, to meet an opinion amongst readers of Shakspeare, who have not very critically examined the principles upon which a text is founded, that there is a broad and pretty equal question between the advocates for the text of the first folio, and the advocates for the text of the plays which had appeared separately in quarto previous to the publication of that edition. The real question, as it has been seen, is one of much narrower limits, upon the face of it. There are only fourteen plays originally published separately to which the important question of differences of readings can at all apply. In comparing these separate plays amongst themselves—one edition of the same play with another edition—the matter becomes more complex; and there is greater scope given to the industry of those who collate, and to the ingenuity of those who build riddles upon the collation. Some would

even collate every single copy of the same edition. Be it so. All this implies homage ; and does no harm, if we connect it with higher things. We subjoin a list of the first editions of the quarto plays, with the dates of their original publication, and the date of the entry of each at Stationers' Hall ; mentioning, however, that there had been previous editions of " Romeo and Juliet," and of " Hamlet," essentially very different, not only in the matter common to each, but in their extent. We add, with an object which we shall presently explain, the names of the publishers :—

Name of Play published in Quarto.	Date of First Edition.	Date of Entry at Stationers' Hall.	Publishers' Names.
Richard II. - -	1597	1597	Andrew Wise.
Richard III. - -	1597	1597	William Wise.
Romeo and Juliet, "cor- rected and augment- ed."	1599	—	Cuthbert Burby.
Love's Labour's Lost -	1598	—	Cuthbert Burby.
Henry IV., Part I. -	1598	1597	Andrew Wise.
Henry IV., Part II. -	1600	1600	Andrew Wise and Wm. Aspley.
Merchant of Venice -	1600	1598	Thomas Heyes.
Midsummer Night's Dream.	1600	1600	Thomas Fisher.
Much ado about No- thing.	1600	1600	A. Wise and Wm. Aspley.
Titus Andronicus . (An edition is stated to have appeared in 1594.)	1600	1593	Edward White.
Hamlet, "enlarged to almost as much again as it was."	1604	—	N. Landure.
Lear - - -	1608	1607	Nat. Butter.
Troilus and Cressida -	1609	1608	R. Bonian and H. Whalley.
Othello - - -	1622	1621	Thomas Walkley.

The editors of the first folio, as we have seen, use in their preface the following words:—
“Before you were abused with *divers* stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed them.” It is necessary that we should examine to which of the plays published before the folio this strong charge applies. It has been thought to invoke a sweeping condemnation of *all* the previous editions;—but this is not so: it applies only to “*divers* stolen and surreptitious copies.” We know not if there were *other* “stolen and surreptitious copies” besides those which may be included in the quartos preserved to us. There may have been meagre and worthless copies, which, as far as we know, may have perished. We believe that the condemnation does not in any degree apply to the first *nine* of the plays included in the list which we have just given. Upon the quarto editions of those plays, the text of the folio, with slight alterations, is unquestionably founded. Verbal corrections, and in one or two cases additions and omissions, are found in the folio;—but they are only such as an author, having his printed works before him during at least sixteen years, would naturally make. The most considerable additions are to “The Second Part of Henry IV.”—These nine plays, do not furnish the slightest internal evidence of appearing to be printed from an imperfect copy. Further, in seven out of the nine cases, the proprietary

interest of the original publishers of these plays never lapses. Andrew and William Wise, in connexion with William Aspley, are the original publishers of "Richard II.," "Richard III.," the two Parts of "Henry IV.," and "Much Ado about Nothing;" they, and their assign or partner, Matthew Law, print many editions of the historical plays, from 1597 to 1622: and then Aspley becomes a proprietor of the folio, to which his name is affixed as one of the publishers. Cuthbert Burby is the original publisher of the "augmented" "Romeo and Juliet," and of "Love's Labour's Lost;" in 1607 he assigns his interest to John Smethwick: they publish several editions of "Romeo and Juliet," from 1599 to 1609; and Smethwick finally becomes a proprietor also of the folio of 1623. With regard to "The Merchant of Venice," and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," we cannot trace the proprietary interest of their original publishers down to the publication of the folio, by any entries in the books of the Stationers' Company.* Of each of these plays there were also editions in 1600, but none after;—one of each bearing the name of a publisher, and the other of a printer, J. Roberts. "Titus Andronicus" has also the distinction of being printed with remarkable accu-

* The books of the Stationers' Company were examined by Steevens, and he transcribed and published all the entries which could bear upon the works of Shakspeare; but he made no deductions from the facts.

racy in the quarto editions ; which editions with slight alterations, though with one Scene added, form the text of the folio.

The reader will have observed, as a remarkable circumstance, that the ten plays which we have thus described as authentic copies were printed during the short period of four years. In 1598 Francis Meres notices, as examples of Shakspeare's excellence in comedy and tragedy, certain plays then existing. Of the plays printed in 1600 his list includes all that we have exhibited, with the exception of "Much Ado about Nothing ;" and it contains only four other plays not then printed, namely, "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." "The Comedy of Errors," "Love's Labour Won" (supposed to be "All's Well that Ends Well"), and "King John." It will be observed, also, that of these ten plays five were printed in one year, 1600. We think that it may be shown with tolerable certainty that none of Shakspeare's plays were subsequently printed before his death, except piratically ; or with the intention of giving a "true and perfect copy" instead of a piratical one ; or under some peculiar circumstances which are naturally involved in mystery. Of those so printed separately the number is only six. We must notice them in detail.

In 1600 appeared "*The Chronicle History of Henry V.*," &c. This edition contains about half the number of lines of that in the folio copy. The additions consist of all the choruses, the whole of the first scene of Act I., and some

of the most spirited speeches. The entire play is indeed recast; and yet although it is perfectly evident, from the passage in the chorus to the fifth act referring to

“ the general of our gracious queen

(As in good time he may) from Ireland coming,”

that the choruses were introduced in 1599, they appear not in the first edition of 1600, nor in the second of 1602, nor in the third of 1608. There can be no question, we think, that the original play of “ Henry V.,” as exhibited in these quartos, was a hasty sketch, afterwards worked up into the perfect form in which we now find it; that the piratical publishers had obtained a copy of that sketch,—but that they were effectually prevented obtaining a copy with the additions and amendments. We think it by no means improbable that the piratical publication of this play in its imperfect state—as perfect as could be obtained by the publishers without the consent of the author, or proprietors—was one of the consequences of a change in the policy upon which Shakspeare’s theatre was conducted. We have seen that, from 1597 to 1600, ten plays were published in a perfect state, differing very slightly from the copies published after his death by the authority of his friends and “ fellows.” Previous to the publication of “ Henry V.,” in 1600, no edition that can be considered piratical had appeared. In 1602 came out another imperfect, and probably mutilated copy—“ *The*

Merry Wives of Windsor." The first edition of Arthur Johnson, in 1602, and a subsequent edition of 1619, present only the sketch of that play as we now have it from the folio. The improvements and additions in this case are as numerous and important as in the "Henry V." But they were never suffered to be published till they appeared in the folio. "*Hamlet*" differs from the two preceding instances, from a genuine copy having been brought out immediately after the appearance of what was most probably a piratical one. The unique first edition in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire (reprinted in 1825) is, like "Henry V." and "The Merry Wives of Windsor," a sketch as compared with the finished play. It was published by N. L. (Nicholas Ling) and John Trundell, in 1603 ; but in 1604 an edition was published by N. Landure, "newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect copie." This is the play, with very slight variations, as we now possess it ; and this edition was reprinted four times in Shakspeare's life, having become the property of John Smethwick, who, as we have mentioned, became one of the publishers of the folio. "*Lear*" was published by Nathaniel Butter in 1608, and in that year he produced three editions. No future edition appears till that of the folio, while "*Hamlet*," and "*Romeo and Juliet*," are constantly reprinted. Butter's edition of "*Lear*" is however a correct one. He must have had a

genuine copy. "*Troilus and Cressida*," published by R. Bonian and H. Whalley, in 1609, is a genuine copy.

We have now gone through the list of all the quarto plays that appeared before Shakspeare's death. "*Othello*," the only other quarto, was not printed till 1622. It is a genuine copy; and its publication may have had some influence in determining the proprietors of Shakspeare's authentic plays, whether printed or in manuscript, to form and publish the collection of 1623.

It is impossible, we think, to imagine that this decided system of publication of Shakspeare's plays up to 1600, and of non-publication after 1600, could have been the result of accident. Malone assigns as a reason for this remarkable circumstance, that, "if we suppose him to have written for the stage during a period of twenty years, those pieces which were produced in the latter part of that period were less likely to pass through the press in his lifetime, as the curiosity of the public had not been so long engaged by them as by his early compositions." This reasoning is singularly erroneous. Not a single play, with the exception of the two Parts of "*The Contention*," was printed before 1597, and in 1600 ten had been printed, in addition to the two Parts of "*The Contention*." According to Malone, the curiosity of the public had not begun to operate till 1597; and it ceased to operate after 1600, when the reputation of the author

was becoming greater and greater, and he was making the highest efforts to place it above all competition. The demand for new editions of those plays which had been published before 1600 was very remarkable, in an age when books were comparatively of slow sale ; and that demand must have offered abundant encouragement to publish the more important plays, which were written after 1600, and which remained unpublished till the appearance of the folio of 1623. There were three great exceptions, as we have seen, to the system of non-publication—"Hamlet," "Lear," and "Troilus and Cressida." We are inclined to believe that each of these was published under the authority of the author, or, at any rate, without his power of suppression ; although their publication might be at variance with the general policy of the proprietors of the Globe Theatre. "Hamlet," "enlarged to almost as much again as it was," was printed, it may be supposed, to vindicate the author's claims to something higher than the early sketch which appeared in the edition of 1603. "Lear" and "Troilus and Cressida" stand, we believe, upon other ground. They were both, as we shall have to state more particularly in our notices of those plays, probably acted for the first time before the court of James I., and it is not impossible that the copies so used were out of the control of the players who represented these dramas ; and that some one, authorised or not, printed each play from the copy employed at these private represen-

tations "by the King's Majesty's servants." The utter disregard of metre in the "Lear" proves that the edition was not printed from the author's copy.

The statements which we have thus laid before our readers are necessary to explain the principles upon which our text has been founded. The folio of 1623 contains thirty-six plays : of these, thirteen were published in the author's lifetime, with such internal evidences of authenticity, and under such circumstances, as warrant us in receiving them as authentic copies. These copies are, therefore, entitled to a very high respect in the settlement of the author's text. But they do not demand an exclusive respect ; for the evidence, in several instances, is most decided, that the author's posthumous copies in manuscript were distinguished from the printed copies by verbal alterations, by additions, by omissions not arbitrarily made, by a more correct metrical arrangement. To refer these differences to alterations made by the players has been a favourite theory with some of Shakspeare's editors ; but it is manifestly an absurd one. We see, in numerous cases, the minute but most effective touches of the skilful artist ; and a careful examination of this matter in the plays where the alterations are most numerous is quite sufficient to satisfy us of the jealous care with which Shakspeare watched over the more important of these productions, so as to leave with his "fellows" more complete and accurate copies than had been preserved by the press.

Between the quarto editions of the four Comedies, — “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “The Merchant of Venice,” “Much Ado about Nothing,” — and the folio of 1623, the variations are exceedingly few; and these have probably, for the most part, been created by the printer. Of the Histories, “Richard II.” in the folio is founded upon the quarto of 1608, with the omission of about fifty lines. The variations between the two copies of “The First Part of Henry IV.” are very slight. In the “Second Part of Henry IV.” there are large additions in the folio. “Richard III.,” in the folio, presents an example of constant verbal alterations, evidently made with a most minute scrupulousness: there are two passages omitted, although in the author’s best manner, and about a hundred and twenty lines added. Of the Tragedies. “Romeo and Juliet,” in the folio, is founded upon the quarto of 1599, with occasional verbal alterations. “Titus Andronicus” is essentially the same in the folio as the quarto of 1600, with the exception of the added scene. “Hamlet,” in the folio, is founded upon the quarto of 1604, but the verbal alterations are numerous; and there are passages omitted in the folio which we should indeed be sorry to lose, although there was probably a dramatic reason for their omission. The most important of the variations between the quartos and the folio are to be found in “Lear.” The verbal alterations are perpetually recurring, but the changes of the

folio are decidedly to be preferred in nearly every instance. The metrical arrangement of the quarto is one mass of confusion ; we have about fifty lines added in the folio, and about two hundred and twenty-five lines omitted : for these omissions there is again a sufficient dramatic reason, although it is truly fortunate that passages of such exquisite beauty as they for the most part are should have been preserved to us in the original publication. "Troilus and Cressida," in the folio, differs in the very smallest degree from the text of the quarto copy. The verbal changes in "Othello" are few ; but there are many additional lines in the folio.

We have thus seen that of the fourteen plays originally published in quarto, which may be considered authentic, nine of that number contain very unimportant differences from the text in the folio. The differences, however, are not merely the typographical changes which always creep into any new edition : they are in many cases either the corrections of the author, or the corrections of those who represented the plays. The Theatre, there can be no doubt, possessed a manuscript copy, as Heminge and Condell expressly tell us ; and the variations, especially in the metrical arrangement, even in those plays which appear the most alike, afford satisfactory evidence that in the re-publication some manuscript was referred to. We are bound, therefore, we think, upon these grounds, to make the later copy the foundation of the text, pointing out the

deviations from the text of the quartos, whenever the differences are of importance.

Of the other five plays, in which the variations between the quarto editions and the folio are more important, we have not only to adhere to the principles just laid down, but to preserve even what the author, we may believe, advisedly rejected ; and, in preserving it, to furnish materials for a just appreciation of the judgment with which he retrenched as well as added. Where there are omissions in the folio of passages found in the quartos, such omissions not being superseded by an extended or a condensed passage of a similar character, we give them a place in the text ; distinguishing them, however, by brackets. But we utterly object to the principle which has too often guided the modern editors, of making up a text, when the variations are considerable, out of the text of the quartos and that of the folio. If any part of the variation demonstrates that it is the author's improvement, we are bound to receive the whole of the improvement, with the exception of any manifest typographical error ; satisfying, however, the critical reader, by giving him the original passage in a note. To act upon any other principle is to set up private judgment against all authority.

But if the principle which we have just laid down be all-important with regard to the authentic quartos, how much more important is it with reference to those plays which are essentially, and upon the face of them, imperfect and deformed !

In three instances, those of "Romeo and Juliet," "Henry V.," and "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and especially in the first two, the modern editors have received the text of the imperfect copy as something to be relied upon ; and wherever they have found a line not in the folio they have thrust it in, and clamoured for its restoration. These imperfect plays, amongst which we include the two Parts of "The Contention," are of the highest importance to the student of Shakspeare, to show how our great poet earned his laurel, in the opinion of his contemporaries, by the most diligent industry : —

" Yet must I not give Nature all ; thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part : —
For though the poet's matter Nature be,
His art doth give the fashion : and that he
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the Muses' anvil ; turn the same
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame ;
Or, for the laurel he may gain a scorn, —
For a good poet's made, as well as born :
And such wert thou."

Having disposed, then, of these general considerations of the value of the quarto copies, we have to inquire what reliance we are to place upon the texts of those plays which appear for the first time in the folio of 1623, and upon which we must absolutely depend for a competent knowledge of these inestimable productions. We say absolutely, for in any matters of serious difficulty the subsequent editions offer us comparatively very little aid. The second edition of 1632 was

held up as an authority by Steevens, because, in some degree, it appeared to fall in with his notions of versification. We doubt if it had an editor properly so called ; for the most obvious typographical errors are repeated without change. The printer, probably, of this edition occasionally pieced out what he considered an imperfect line, and altered a word here and there that had grown obsolete during the changes in our language since Shakspeare first wrote. But, beyond this, we have no help in the second edition ; and none whatever in the subsequent ones. For eighteen plays, therefore, the folio of 1623 must be received as the only accredited copy — standing in the same relation to the text as the one manuscript of an ancient author. For four other plays it must be received as the only accredited complete copy. How, then, appear the copies printed for the first time in this folio with regard to correctness ? We have no hesitation in stating that, with one or two exceptions, the text of these plays may be considered to be as correct, and as little corrupted, as those which had the advantage of having previously gone through the press. This is a most remarkable circumstance with reference to any posthumous publication ; and when we consider the essential difficulties which belong to the correct printing of a play — the mistaking of one character for another, the confusion which must arise from the intermingling of prose and verse, the varieties of the versification itself, and the possibility of receiving the stage

directions as the text,—it is perfectly astonishing that these productions have come down to us with so few vital errors and deformities.

After this long digression (which is however material to the study of Shakspeare), we return to his modern Editors.

It appears from Malone's preface that a feeling was gaining ground that the constant accession of notes to Shakspeare was becoming an evil : — “ The admirers of this poet will, I trust, not merely pardon the great accession of new notes in the present edition, but examine them with some degree of pleasure. An idle notion has been propagated that Shakspeare has been *buried under his commentators* ; and it has again and again been repeated by the tasteless and the dull, ‘ that notes, though often necessary, are *necessary evils*.’ During the era of conjectural criticism and capricious innovation, notes were indeed evils : while one page was covered with ingenious sophistry in support of some idle conjecture, and another was wasted in its overthrow, or in erecting a new fabric equally unsubstantial as the former While our object is to support and establish what the poet wrote, to illustrate his phraseology by comparing it with that of his contemporaries, and to explain his fugitive allusions to customs long since disused and forgotten,—while this object is kept steadily in view, if even every line of his plays were accompanied with a comment, every intelligent reader would be indebted to the industry of him

who produced it. Such uniformly has been the object of the notes now presented to the public. Let us then hear no more of this barbarous jargon concerning Shakspeare's having been *elucidated* into *obscurity*, and buried under the load of his commentators." There is a great deal of truth in this ; but it is not all the truth. Malone disagrees with the following observation of Johnson : — " It is not (he remarks) very grateful to consider how little the succession of editors has added to this author's power of pleasing. He was read, admired, studied, and imitated, while he was yet deformed with all the improprieties which ignorance and neglect could accumulate upon him." The new editor, with a pardonable complacency towards his calling, says, — " He certainly was read, admired, studied, and imitated at the period mentioned ; but surely not in the same degree as at present. The succession of editors has effected this ; it has made him understood ; it has made him popular ; it has shown every one who is capable of reading how much superior he is not only to Jonson and Fletcher, whom the bad taste of the last age from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century set above him, but to all the dramatic poets of antiquity." Jonson and Fletcher were not set above Shakspeare, as we have demonstratively shown, from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century. But even if they were, it was not the succession of editors that had made Shakspeare popular. A plain reprint of Shakspeare

without a single note, but with the spelling modernized, would have made him more popular than all the critical editions which the eighteenth century had produced. Malone says, that during that century "thirty thousand copies of Shakspeare have been dispersed through England." The number would have been quadrupled if Shakspeare had been left to his own unaided power. Much of what the commentators did, especially in the illustration of Shakspeare's phraseology and the explanation of his fugitive allusions, they did well. But they must needs be critics, without having any system of criticism more profound than the easy task of fault-finding; and thus they rendered Shakspeare less popular than he would have been in an age when criticism was little understood, and men's eyes were dazzled by an array of names to support some flippant remark upon Shakspeare's want of art, some exhibition of his ignorance, some detection of his anachronisms, some discovery of a quibble beyond the plain meaning of the word. It is scarcely possible to read a scene of the variorum "Shaksperes" without feeling the utter want of a reverent spirit towards the author. These things sank more deeply into the minds of the readers of Shakspeare than the general expressions of the commentators' admiration; which after all seemed little more than compliments to themselves in their association with the poet. Schlegel, we cannot but acknowledge, has stated the

truth with tolerable exactness : — “ Like Dante, Shakspeare has received the indispensable but cumbersome honour of being treated like a classical author of antiquity. The oldest editions have been carefully collated, and where the readings seemed corrupted many improvements have been attempted ; and the whole literature of his age has been drawn forth from the oblivion to which it had been consigned, for the sake of explaining the phrases, and illustrating the allusions, of Shakspeare. Commentators have succeeded one another in such numbers, that their labours, with the critical controversies to which they have given rise, constitute of themselves a library of no inconsiderable magnitude. These labours are deserving of our praise and gratitude ; and more especially the historical inquiries into the sources from which Shakspeare drew his materials, and into the former state of the English stage. But with respect to the criticisms which are merely a of philological nature, I am frequently compelled to differ from the commentators ; and where they consider him merely as a poet, endeavour to pronounce upon his merits, and to enter into his views, I must separate myself from them entirely. I have hardly ever found either truth or profundity in their observations ; and these critics seem to me to be but stammering interpreters of the general and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen.” *

* Lectures on Dramatic Literature, Black's Translation, vol. ii., p. 103.

We open a play at a venture, to see how far in the spirit of a modest appreciation of themselves, and an earnest admiration of their author, the editors laboured to render Shakspeare popular. It is Hamlet. Let us put down a few of their annotations :—

“ *Angry parle.* This is one of the affected words introduced by Lyly.” — STEEVENS.

“ *A mote it is, &c.* These lines are in the enlarged quarto of 1604. Many of its (Hamlet’s) absurdities as well as beauties arose from the quantity added after it was first written.” — STEEVENS.

“ *Shall I strike at it with my partizan.* I am unwilling to suppose that Shakspeare could appropriate these absurd effusions to Horatio.” — STEEVENS.

“ *I am too much i’ the sun.* I question whether a quibble between *sun* and *son* be not here intended.” — FARMER.

“ *To school in Wittenberg.*” The anachronism is first pointed out by MALONE ; and then we are told by RITSON that Shakspeare derived his knowledge of this famous university from a trumpery book called “ *The Life of Jack Wilton.*”

“ *Nemean.* The right prosody is accidental.” — MALONE.

“ *Rest, rest, perturbed spirit.*” The skill displayed in the management of the Ghost is contrasted with his management of other preternatural beings : “ They are but weak and inefficacious pageants.” — STEEVENS.

Conclusion of Scene I., Act II. “The poet’s ill and obscure expression seems to have been caused by his affectation of concluding the scene with a couplet.” — JOHNSON.

“*Being a good kissing carrion.*” Warburton’s reading being given: “This is a noble emendation, which almost sets the critic on a level with the author. — JOHNSON.”

“*The satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards.*” Warburton says that the allusion is to Juvenal, Satire 10. “If Shakspeare had read Juvenal he could not have wrongly accented Posthumus.” — FARMER.

“*Now might I do it, &c.* This speech is too horrible to be read or to be uttered.” — JOHNSON. “Yet some moral may be extracted from it, as all his subsequent calamities were owing to this savage refinement of revenge.” — M. MASON.

“*Heaven’s face doth glow, &c.* In Shakspeare’s licentious diction the meaning may be,” &c. — MALONE.

End of Act IV. “Shakspeare has been unfortunate in his management of the story of this play, the most striking circumstances of which arise so early in its formation as not to leave him room for a conclusion suited to the importance of its beginning. After this last interview with the Ghost, the character of Hamlet has lost all its consequence.” — STEEVENS.

“*Nature is fine in love; and where ’tis fine
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves.*”

“ These lines are not in the quarto, and might have been omitted in the folio without great loss, for they are obscure and affected.” — JOHNSON.

“ *It was that very day that young Hamlet was born.* The poet in the fifth act had forgotten what he wrote in the first.” — BLACKSTONE.

“ *There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.*

“ Dr. Farmer informs me that these words are merely technical. A wool-man, butcher, and dealer in *skewers*, lately observed to him that his nephew (an idle lad) could only *assist* him in making them ; ‘ He could *rough-hew* them, but I was obliged to *shape their ends*.’ To shape the ends of *wool-skewers*, i. e. to *point* them, requires a degree of skill : any one can *rough-hew* them. Whoever recollects the profession of Shakspeare's father will admit that his son might be no stranger to such terms. I have frequently seen packages of wool pinned up with *skewers*.” — STEEVENS.

Concluding Remarks. — “ The poet is accused of having shown little regard to poetical justice, and may be charged with equal neglect of poetical probability. The apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose ; the revenge which he demands is not obtained but by the death of him that was required to take it ; and the gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer is abated by the

untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious." — JOHNSON.

"Hamlet cannot be said to have pursued his ends by very warrantable means; and if the poet, when he sacrificed him at last, meant to have enforced such a moral, it is not the worst that can be deduced from the play. . . . Hamlet seems to have been hitherto regarded as a hero not undeserving the pity of the audience; and because no writer on Shakspeare has taken the pains to point out the immoral tendency of his character." — STEEVENS.

The editors of the first collection of the works of Shakspeare, in their "Address to the great Variety of Readers," say — "Read him therefore; and again, and again: and if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger not to understand him." This was advice that could not have proceeded from any common mind. The foundation of a right understanding of Shakspeare is love. Steevens read again and again without love, and therefore without understanding. Boswell, the editor of Malone's posthumous edition, speaking of Steevens's note on Hamlet from which we have given an extract, says, that Steevens has expressed himself "with as much asperity as if he had had a personal quarrel with the author." Steevens had a pettifogging mind, without a particle of lofty feeling, without imagination, without even a logical apprehension of the small questions to which he applied himself. But he was wonderfully la-

borious. Knowing nothing of the principles of philosophical criticism, he spared no pains in hunting up illustrative facts ; he dabbled in classical learning so as to be able to apply a quotation with considerable neatness ; and he laboured his style into epigrammatic smartness which passed for wit. The vicious style of the letters of Junius was evidently his model ; and what that cowardly libeller had been in the political world, Steevens was ambitious to be in the literary. He very often attacked, under a mask, those with whom he mixed in intimate companionship ; till at last his name became a by-word for meanness and malignity. It was impossible that such a man could have written about Shakspeare without displaying “as much asperity as if he had had a personal quarrel with him.” And yet he was to be pitied. Like Hamlet, he had a task laid upon him above his powers. Early in life he attached himself to literature and literary pursuits, not from any necessity, for his fortune was ample, but with a real and sincere devotion. He attached himself to Shakspeare. He became an editor of Shakspeare. He was associated with Johnson in the preparation of an edition, and what he did in his own way was far superior to what his colleague had effected without him. He gave a new tone to the critical illustration of Shakspeare, by bringing not only the elegant literature of Shakspeare’s own age to compare with him, but by

hunting over all the sweepings of the book-stalls of the same age, to find the application of a familiar allusion, or the meaning of an uncommon word. But he became ambitious to show his power of writing, as well as his diligence. If we turn over the variorum editions, and light upon a note which contains something like a burst of genial admiration for the author, we find the name of Warburton affixed to it. Warburton's intellect was capacious enough for love of Shakspeare. But he delighted in decorating his opinions with the tinsel of his own paradoxes. Steevens was the man to pull off the tinsel; but he did it after the fashion in which the lace was stripped from Brother Jack's coat:—"Courteous reader, you are given to understand that zeal is never so highly obliged as when you set it a-tearing; and Jack, who doted on that quality in himself, allowed it at this time its full swing. Thus it happened that, stripping down a parcel of gold lace a little too hastily, he rent the main body of his coat from top to bottom; and whereas his talent was not of the happiest in taking up a stitch, he knew no better way than to darn it again with packthread and a skewer."* The zeal for tearing increased with Steevens. He retired for fifteen years from the editorship of Shakspeare, to recreate himself in the usual way in which such minds find diversion — by anonymous attacks upon his literary contemporaries. But in 1793 he returned with

* Tale of a Tub.

renewed vigour to his labour of love, the defacing of Shakspeare. Malone, in the interval, had been working hard, though perhaps with no great talent, in the endeavour to preserve every vestige of his author. He was successful, and Steevens was thenceforward his enemy. He would no longer walk in the path that he had once trod. He rejected all his old conservative opinions. In his edition of 1793, he sets out in his Advertisement with the following well-known manifesto against a portion of the works of Shakspeare, the supposed merit or demerit of which, it is perfectly evident, must have been applied as a standard for other portions of Shakspeare's poetical excellence:—"We have not reprinted the Sonnets, &c., of Shakspeare, because the strongest Act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service; notwithstanding these miscellaneous poems have derived every possible advantage from the literature and judgment of their only intelligent editor, Mr. Malone, whose implements of criticism, like the ivory rake and golden spade in Prudentius, are on this occasion disgraced by the objects of their culture. Had Shakspeare produced no other works than these, his name would have reached us with as little celebrity as time has conferred on that of Thomas Watson, an older and much more elegant sonneteer." Brother Jack is here not only tearing the coat, but throwing the waistcoat into the fire. Let us

hear how he means to deal with the coat itself: —
“ But, as we are often reminded by our ‘ brethren of the craft ’ that this or that emendation, however apparently necessary, is not the *genuine text of Shakspeare*, it might be imagined that we had received this text from its fountain-head, and were therefore certain of its purity. Whereas few literary occurrences are better understood than that it came down to us discoloured by ‘ the variation of every soil ’ through which it had flowed, and that it stagnated at last in the muddy reservoir of the first folio: in plainer terms, that the vitiations of a careless theatre were seconded by those of as ignorant a press. The integrity of dramas thus prepared for the world is just on a level with the innocence of females nursed in a camp and educated in a bagnio. As often, therefore, as we are told that, by admitting corrections warranted by common sense and the laws of metre, we have not rigidly adhered to the text of Shakspeare, we shall entreat our opponents to exchange that phrase for another ‘ more germane,’ and say, instead of it, that we have deviated from the text of the publishers of single plays in quarto, or their successors, the editors of the first folio; that we have sometimes followed the suggestions of a Warburton, a Johnson, a Farmer, or a Tyrwhitt, in preference to the decisions of a Hemings or a Condell, notwithstanding their choice of readings might have been influenced by associates whose high-sounding

names cannot fail to enforce respect, viz. William Ostler, John Shanke, William Sly, and Thomas Poope." Again:—"It is time, instead of a timid and servile adherence to ancient copies, when (offending against sense and metre) they furnish no real help, that a future editor, well acquainted with the phraseology of our author's age, should be at liberty to restore some apparent meaning to his corrupted lines, and a decent flow to his obstructed versification. The latter (as already has been observed) may be frequently effected by the expulsion of useless and supernumerary syllables, and an occasional supply of such as might fortuitously have been omitted, notwithstanding the declaration of Hemings and Condell, whose fraudulent preface asserts that they have published our author's plays 'as absolute in their numbers as he conceived them.' Till somewhat resembling the process above suggested be authorized, the public will ask in vain for a commodious and pleasant text of Shakspeare. Nothing will be lost to the world on account of the measure recommended, there being folios and quartos enough remaining for the use of antiquarian or critical travellers, to whom a jolt over a rugged pavement may be more delectable than an easy passage over a smooth one, though they both conduct to the same object."

And this, then, is the text of Shakspeare that England has rejoiced in for half a century! These are the labours, whether of correction or

of critical opinion, that have made Shakspeare "popular." The critical opinions have ceased, we believe, to have any effect except amongst a few pedantic persons, who fancy that it is cleverer to dispraise than to admire. But the text as corrupted by Steevens is that which is generally put into the hands of the readers of Shakspeare. The number of editions of the text alone of Shakspeare printed during the present century is by no means inconsiderable; and of these editions, which are constantly multiplying, there are many thousand copies year by year supplying the large and increasing demand for a knowledge of our greatest poet. With very few exceptions, indeed, all these editions are copies of some edition whose received text is considered as a standard, — even to the copying of typographical errors. That received text, to use the words of the title-page of what is called the trade edition, is "From the text of the corrected copies left by the late George Steevens, Esq., and Edmund Malone, Esq." If we were to suppose, from this title, that Steevens and Malone had agreed together to leave a text for the benefit of posterity, we should be signally deceived. The received text is that produced by Steevens, when he fancied himself "at liberty to restore some apparent meaning to Shakspeare's corrupted lines, and a decent flow to his obstructed versification." Malone was walking in his own track, that of extreme caution, and an implicit reliance on the

very earliest copies. The text of his edition of 1821, though deformed with abundant marks of carelessness, is an honest text, if we admit the principle upon which it is founded. But the text of Steevens, in which the peculiar versification of Shakspeare, especially its freedom, its vigour, its variety of pause, its sweetness, its majesty, are sacrificed to what he called "polished versification," has been received for nearly half a century as the standard text.

Hayley, the head of the school of English poetry "in the most high and balmy state" of Steevens, wrote his epitaph, which concludes with these lines:—

"This tomb may perish, but not so his name,
Who shed new lustre upon Shakspeare's fame."

This may run by the side of Johnson's praise of a sermonizing note of Warburton:—"It almost sets the critic on a level with the author." Steevens, shedding new lustre upon Shakspeare! Warburton, almost upon a level with Shakspeare! Thus men talked in those days, when their notion of poetry was simply that it was not prose. Something in which the mechanical form was to be obviously distinguished from other forms of composition—a sermon, an essay—was poetry. They looked for no inner life in poetry, no organization of its own, that should determine its form. They looked for eight or ten syllable verse, for blank verse or couplet. They looked for syllabic regularity in Shakspeare and a moral.

When they found not the moral they shook their heads. When they found what they called “superfluous syllables” in Shakspeare’s lines, out went the syllables, by carrying over a word to the next line, sometimes of two, sometimes of three syllables. If there was a gap left it was filled up with rubbish. The excess of the second line was carried over to the third, till a halting-place was found or made. This was mending the metre. Mending the moral was not quite so easy to the editors; they left that task to the players, who, to do them justice, were in no degree slow to set about the work with the most laudable emulation of the labours of the critics. They cut out a scene here, and put in another there. Lear was to end with a jig, and Hamlet with a song. The manager-botchers, however, in time grew timid. They wanted new Tates to make new happy endings, but the age of George III. was not luxuriant enough to produce such daring geniuses. The managers, therefore, were obliged to be content with the glorious improvements of the seventeenth century in all essentials. But they did what they could. Shakspeare’s songs were poor, simple things; they had no point; not much about love in them; nothing of loyalty; and so Shakspeare’s comedies were always presented with new songs by the salaried poet of “the house,” for “the house” kept a poet, as the maker of razor-strops did in those days. But Garrick, the twin-star of Shakspeare—

“ Shakspeare and Garrick like twin-stars shall shine,
And earth irradiate with a beam divine ” —

had many a twinkle of his own. In the “ *Biographia Dramatica* ” we have a list of thirty-nine plays by Garrick: — “ He is well known to have been the author of the following, some of which are originals, and the rest translations or alterations from other authors, with a design to adapt them to the present taste of the public.” (A predecessor printed upon the title of a tragedy of which in a similar way he was “ the author,” “ *King Lear, a Tragedy: by Nahum Tate.*”) Garrick’s Shakspearean authorship was confined to *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Fairies* (*Midsummer-Night’s Dream*), *The Tempest*, *Catherine and Petrucio* (*Taming of the Shrew*), *Florizel and Perdita* (*Winter’s Tale*), *Cymbeline*, *Hamlet*. This was pretty well for a twin-star. Is it uncharitable to infer that the Stratford Jubilee in 1769 was something as much for the honour of David Garrick as of William Shakspeare? On this memorable occasion the corporation of Stratford opened their proceedings by thus addressing Garrick: — “ Sir, you who have done the memory of Shakspeare so much honour are esteemed the fittest person to be appointed the first steward of his jubilee.” The ode upon dedicating the town-hall, and erecting a statue to Shakspeare, was written by Garrick, as well as spoken by him. It is quite as good as birthday odes used to be. It would be beyond our limits to describe

the effect which this ode produced ; how rapturous was the public dinner ; how brilliant were the transparencies in the hall ; and how appropriate were the characters of the masquerade, at which a thousand persons were present. Garrick spoke an oration in honour of Shakspeare, and thus he honours him : — “ We get knowledge from Shakspeare, not with painful labour, as we dig gold from the mine, but at leisure, and with delight, as we gain health and vigour from the sports of the field. A picture frequently pleases which represents an object that in itself is disgusting. Teniers represents a number of Dutch boors drunk and quarrelling in a wretched hovel, and we admire the piece for a kind of relative beauty, as a just imitation of life and nature : with this beauty we are struck in Shakspeare ; we know his originals, and contemplate the truth of his copy with delight.”

This is the narrow view of the art of Shakspeare which Johnson impressed upon his pupil. We read on, and we are bewildered. Slightly have we spoken of Garrick, because we felt that to do what he has done with the masterpieces of Shakspeare, and especially with Hamlet, was to show that he did not understand them. But there is something in this “ Oration in Honour of Shakspeare,” spoken by him at Stratford in 1769, and written by him, as it is said, which shows to us that the author of that oration, or parts of that oration, was far in advance of the critical

opinions of his day. Let us present a consecutive passage which immediately follows that already transcribed:—“It was happy for Shakspeare, and for us, that in his time there was no example by the imitation of which he might hope to be approved. *He painted nature as it appeared to his own eye, and not from a transcript of what was seen in nature by another.* The genius looks not *upon* nature, but *through* it; not at the outline only, but at the differences, nice and innumerable, within it; at all that the variation of tints, and the endless combinations of light and shade, can express. As the power of perception is more, more is still perceived in the inexhaustible varieties of life; but to copy only what another has seen is to render superior perspicacity vain; and neither the painter nor the poet can hope to excel who is content to reflect a reflection, and to seek for nothing in nature which others have not found.

“But there are beauties in Shakspeare not relative—powers that do not imitate, but create. He was as another Nature: he represents not only actions that were not performed, but beings that do not exist; yet to these beings he assigns not only faculties, but character; he gives them not only peculiar dispositions, but characteristic modes of expressing them: they have character, not merely from the passions and understandings, but from situation and habit; Caliban and Ariel, like Shallow and Falstaff, are not more strongly

distinguished in consequence of different natures than of different circumstances and employments.

“ As there was no poet to seduce Shakspeare into imitation, there was no critic to restrain his extravagance ; yet we find *the force of his own judgment sufficient to rein his imagination, and to reduce to system the new world which he made.*

“ Does any one now inquire whether Shakspeare was learned ? Do they mean whether he knew how to call the same thing by several names ? for learning, with respect to languages, teaches no more ; learning, in its best sense, is only nature at the rebound ; it is only the discovery of what is ; and he who looks upon nature with a penetrating eye derives learning from the source. *Rules of poetry have been deduced from examples, and not examples from rules :* as a poet, therefore, Shakspeare did not need books ; and in no instance in which he needed them as a philosopher or historian does he appear ignorant of what they teach.

“ His language, like his conceptions, is strongly marked with the characteristic of nature ; it is bold, figurative, and significant ; his terms, rather than his sentences, are metaphorical ; he calls an endless multitude a sea, by a happy allusion to the perpetual succession of wave to wave ; and he immediately expresses opposition by taking up arms, which, being fit in itself, he was not solicitous to accommodate to his first image. This is the language in which a figurative and rapid

conception will always be expressed: this is the language both of the prophet and the poet, of native eloquence and divine inspiration.

“It has been objected to Shakspeare that he wrote without any moral purpose; but I boldly reply that he has effected a thousand. He has not, indeed, always contrived a series of events from the whole of which some moral precept may be inferred; but he has conveyed some rule of conduct, some principle of knowledge, not only in almost every speech of his dialogue, but in every incident, character, and event.”

We would attempt to deprive no man of his fame; but the passage which we have just transcribed appears to us so contrary to the habits of thought which Garrick must have acquired from his theatrical practice, so opposed to the recorded opinions to which he was in the habit of looking up almost with slavish reverence, that we cannot receive the records of the Stratford Jubilee as evidence that he wrote it. What — was the manufacturer of Shakspeare's plays into farces, and operas, and tragedies with moral endings, to be the first man in England to discover that Shakspeare was a creator; that he lived in a world of his own creation; that the practice of art went before the rules; that the question of his learning was to be settled contrary to the way in which the pedants of criticism had settled it, by the proof that his knowledge was all-abundant; that his judgment was sufficient to rein his ima-

gination ; that he worked upon system, and was therefore an artist in the highest sense of the word ; that what has been called the confusion of his metaphors was the language both of the prophet and the poet ; that his moral purpose was to be collected incidentally, not only through informal speeches, but in every character and event ? The beginning and the end of Garrick's oration is commonplace. Here is a flood of light shed upon the English opinion of Shakspeare. Was there any man in England, at that time, whose philosophy was large enough, whose knowledge was comprehensive enough, to allow him to think thus ? Was there any man in England who dared so to express himself, in the face of authorities who had so recently propounded a totally different system ? There was but one man that we can dream of, and he was Edmund Burke. We cannot think that Garrick wrote these sentences. We can hardly think that he knew the full force of what he was uttering.

It would be a dreary task to attempt to trace all that was published about Shakspeare from the date of Johnson's first edition to the close of the eighteenth century. A few out of the heap of these forgotten emanations of the critical mind, the multitude of which proves the strong direction of the national admiration, may not be unprofitably noticed. Johnson, when he has dismissed Shakspeare from the shackles of the unities,

says, "I am almost frightened at my own temerity." He dreaded the advocates of a contrary opinion, "as Æneas withdrew from the defence of Troy when he saw Neptune shaking the wall." A Neptune arrived from Scotland, in the shape of "Cursory Remarks on Tragedy." This work, though it dropped into oblivion, was the performance of W. Richardson, "Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow." A small specimen will suffice:—"With an impartiality which becomes every man that dares to think for himself, let us allow him (Shakspeare) great merit as a comic writer, greater still as a poet, but little, very little, as a tragedian. . . . And is then poor Shakespeare to be excluded from the number of great tragedians? He is; but let him be banished, like Homer from the republic of Plato, with marks of distinction and veneration; and may his forehead, like the Grecian bard's, be bound with an honourable wreath of ever-blooming flowers." There can be no doubt of the paternity of this production. The same Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow produced, in the same year, "A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Characters;" and this book has gone, with the appendage of new characters, through many editions; and is allied, moreover, to Essays on this and that Shakspearean thing, and a "perilous shot" indeed in "An Essay on the Faults of Shakespeare." We shall

give no more than a sentence :—“ I am inclined to believe, and shall now endeavour to illustrate that the greatest blemishes in Shakespeare have proceeded from his want of consummate taste. Having no perfect discernment, proceeding from rational investigation, of the true cause of beauty in poetical composition, he had never established in his mind any system of regular process, or any standard of dramatic excellence.” Yet this solemn person, who thinks that Shakspeare had never established in his mind any system of regular process, had no perfect discernment of the true cause of beauty, has the temerity to write a book of four hundred pages on his dramatic characters. Something of a very different description was produced three years after : “ An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff.” The author was Maurice Morgann, once Under Secretary of State. The book is far above the age. The author is a thinker, and one who has been taught to think by Shakspeare. Take an example :—“ In the groups of other poets, the parts which are not seen do not, in fact, exist. . . . Those characters in Shakespeare which are seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole ; every part being, in fact, relative, and inferring all the rest.” The “ Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare,” by Thomas Whately, published in 1785, is something different from the performance of the Scotch pro-

fessor. What could induce his eminent relation, who republished it in 1839, to write thus? — “Mr. Whately, it should be observed, is merely pointing out that such and such speeches *do* indicate character; not that they were, in each case, written with that *design*. If, then, they really *are* characteristic, the criticism is fully borne out, whatever may have been the design of Shakespere. I doubt whether Shakespere ever had any thought at all of making his personages speak characteristically. In most instances, I conceive—probably in all—he drew characters correctly, because he *could not avoid it*, and would never have attained, in that department, such excellence as he has, if he had made any studied efforts for it. And the same, probably, may be said of Homer, and of those other writers who have excelled the most in delineating characters.” Was the “Paul preaching at Athens,” with the Apostle characterised in his majesty, the sceptic in his doubt, and the enthusiast in his veneration, (characters marked as deeply as the Richard and Macbeth upon which the relation of the Archbishop of Dublin writes,) — was this produced by Raffaele because he could not avoid it? We would willingly give an extract or two from this clever book, but its republication renders such unnecessary. There is one more work, and one only, to which we may point as being superior to the ordinary criticism of that age — “the butterwoman’s rank

to market." It is Mr. Whiter's "Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare," published in 1794. We have often quoted it, which may be sufficient to mention for our present purpose.

Amidst the crowd of writers, from the middle to the end of the eighteenth century, who were adding to the mass of comment upon Shakspeare, whether in the shape of essay, letter, poem, philosophical analysis, illustration, there was one who, not especially devoting himself to Shakspearean criticism, had a considerable influence in the gradual formation of a sound national taste. The "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry," by Thomas Percy, originally published in 1765, showed to the world that there was something in the early writers beyond the use to which they had been applied by Shakspeare's commentators. In these fragments it would be seen that England, from the earliest times, had possessed an inheritance of real poetry; and that he who had breathed a new life into the forms of the past, and had known how to call up the heroes of chivalry, — to

"Enlive their pale trunks, that the present age
Joys in their joy, and trembles at their rage,"

was not without models of earnest passion and noble simplicity in the ancient ballads. The publication of these "Reliques" led the way, though slowly, to the study of our elder poets; and every advance in this direction was a step

towards the more extended knowledge, and the better understanding, of Shakspeare himself. Percy, in one part of his first volume, collected “such ballads as are quoted by Shakespeare, or contribute in any degree to illustrate his writings.” He did this with his usual good taste; and every one knows with what skill he connected in the tale of “The Friar of Orders Grey” those “innumerable little fragments of ancient ballads” which we find dispersed through the plays of Shakspeare. In his introduction to this division of his work he gives some very sensible observations upon the origin of the English stage. In the following remarks on the Histories of our poet he takes a different, and we think a juster, view of their origin and purpose than Malone and the other commentators. Although Percy puts his own opinions cautiously, if not timidly, it is clear that he had higher notions of Shakspeare as an artist than those who were arrogating to themselves the merit of having made him “popular.” He who holds that it is “the first canon of sound criticism to examine any work by whatever rule the author prescribed for his own observance” is not far from a right appreciation of Shakspeare:—“But while Shakespeare was the favourite dramatic poet, his Histories had such superior merit, that he might well claim to be the chief, if not the only, historic dramatist that kept possession of the English stage; which gives a strong support to the tradition mentioned

by Gildon, that, in a conversation with Ben Jonson, our bard vindicated his historical plays, by urging that, as he had found 'the nation in general very ignorant of history, he wrote them in order to instruct the people in this particular.' This is assigning not only a good motive, but a very probable reason, for his preference of this species of composition ; since we cannot doubt but his illiterate countrymen would not only want such instruction when he first began to write, notwithstanding the obscure dramatic chroniclers who preceded him, but also that they would highly profit by his admirable Lectures on English History so long as he continued to deliver them to his audience. And, as it implies no claim to his being the *first* who introduced our chronicles on the stage, I see not why the tradition should be rejected.

“ Upon the whole, we have had abundant proof that both Shakespeare and his contemporaries considered his Histories, or Historical Plays, as of a legitimate distinct species, sufficiently separate from Tragedy and Comedy ; a distinction which deserves the particular attention of his critics and commentators, who, by not adverting to it, deprive him of his proper defence and best vindication for his neglect of the unities and departure from the classical dramatic forms. For, if it be the first canon of sound criticism to examine any work by whatever rule the author prescribed for his own observance, then we ought

not to try Shakespeare's Histories by the general laws of tragedy or comedy. Whether the rule itself be vicious or not is another inquiry: but, certainly, we ought to examine a work only by those principles according to which it was composed. This would save a deal of impertinent criticism."

"The History of English Poetry," by Thomas Warton, published in 1774, was another of those works which advanced the study of our early literature in the spirit of elegant scholarship as opposed to bibliographical pedantry. Warton was an ardent lover of Shakspeare, as we may collect from several little poems; but he was scarcely out of the trammels of the classical school. His education had taught him that Shakspeare worked without art, and indeed he held that most of the Elizabethan poets so worked:—"It may here be added that only a few critical treatises, and but one 'Art of Poetry' were now written. Sentiments and images were not absolutely determined by the canons of composition; nor was genius awed by the consciousness of a future and final arraignment at the tribunal of taste. A certain dignity of inattention to niceties is now visible in our writers. Without too closely consulting a criterion of correctness, every man indulged his own capriciousness of invention. The poet's appeal was chiefly to his own voluntary feelings, his own immediate and peculiar mode of conception. And this freedom of thought

was often expressed in an undisguised frankness of diction ; a circumstance, by the way, that greatly contributed to give the flowing modulation which now marked the measures of our poets, and which soon degenerated into the opposite extreme of dissonance and asperity. Selection and discrimination were often overlooked. Shakspeare wandered in pursuit of universal nature. The glancings of his eye are from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. We behold him breaking the barriers of imaginary method. In the same scene he descends from his meridian of the noblest tragic sublimity to puns and quibbles, to the meanest merriment of a plebeian farce. In the midst of his dignity he resembles his own Richard II., the *skipping king*, who sometimes, discarding the state of a monarch,

‘ Mingled his royalty with carping fools.’

He seems not to have seen any impropriety in the most abrupt transitions, from dukes to buffoons, from senators to sailors, from counsellors to constables, and from kings to clowns. Like Virgil’s majestic oak —

‘ Quantum vertice ad auras
Ætherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit.’ ”

All this is prettily said ; but it would not have been said if Warton had lived half a century later. Scattered about the periodical “ Essayists ” are many papers on Shakspeare, worth consulting by the student, which, if not very valuable in

themselves, indicate at least the progress of opinion. Joseph Warton, in "The Adventurer," where he reviews *The Tempest* and *Lear*, is a great stickler for the unities. Mackenzie, in "The Mirror," has a higher reverence for Shakspeare, and a more philosophical contempt for the application of the ancient rules to works having their own forms of vitality. Cumberland, in "The Observer," contrasts *Macbeth* and *Richard III.*; and he compares Shakspeare with *Æschylus* in a way which exhibits the resources of his scholarship and the elegance of his taste. All the fragmentary critical opinions upon Shakspeare, from the time of Johnson's Preface to the end of the century, exhibit some progress towards the real faith; some attempt to cast off not only the authority of the ancient rules of art, but the smaller authority of that lower school of individual judgment, which the Shakspearean commentators had been propping up, as well as they could, upon their own weak shoulders. Coleridge has well described their pretensions to authority:—"Every critic, who has or has not made a collection of black-letter books,—in itself a useful and respectable amusement,—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from an illustrator into a supreme judge, and, blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial at the waters of Niagara; and determines positively the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive." Such a

critic was Mr. Francis Douce ; who has been at the pains of making a formal essay "On the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare." The words by which Mr. Douce describes these are, of course, "absurdities," "blunders," "distortions of reality," "negligence," "absurd violations of historical accuracy." Some concessions are, however, made by the critic :—"His bestowing the epithet of *gipsy* on Cleopatra is whimsical ; but may, perhaps, admit of defence." It is perfectly clear that a man who talks thus has not the slightest philosophical comprehension of the objects of Art, and the mode in which Art works. The domain of the literal and the ideal is held to be one and the same. It is truly said of the formative arts, by a living painter who knows the philosophy of his own art as much as he excels in its practice, that "a servile attention to the letter of description, as opposed to its translatable spirit, accuracy of historic details, exactness of costume, &c., are not essential in themselves, but are valuable only in proportion as they assist the demands of the art, or produce an effect on the imagination. This may sufficiently explain why an inattention to these points, on the part of great painters (and poets, as compared with mere historians), has interfered so little with their reputation." *

* Preface to Kugler's "History of Painting," by C. L. Eastlake, Esq., R. A.

One of the critics upon Shakspeare has sought to apologize for his anachronisms or "absurdities" by showing the example of the greatest of painters, that of Raffaele, in the "Transfiguration:"—"The two Dominicans on their knees are as shocking a violation of good sense, and of the unities of place, of time, and of action, as it is possible to imagine." It is clear that Martin Sherlock, who writes thus, did not understand the art of Raffaele. This was the spirit of all criticism upon painting and upon poetry. The critic never laboured to conceive the great prevailing idea of "the maker" in either art. He had no central point from which to regard his work. The great painters, especially in their treatment of religious compositions, had their whole soul permeated with the glory and beauty of the subjects upon which they treated. Their art was in itself a worship of the Great Infinite Idea of beauty and truth. The individual forms of humanity, the temporary fashions of human things, were lifted into the region of the universal and the permanent. The Dominicans on their knees in the "Transfiguration" were thus the representatives of adoring mortality during the unfolding to the bodily sense of heavenly glory. Who can see the anachronism, as it is called, till a small critic points it out? Art changes the very nature of those elements by which the imagination is affected. She touches them, and the things are propertied for her use. What is mean, separately

considered, is harmonised by her into greatness ; what is rude, into beauty ; what is low, into sublimity. We fear that it was a want of comprehending the high powers and privileges of Art, whether in poetry or painting, that made the “ Shakspeare Gallery,” which, towards the end of the last century, was to raise up an historic school of painting amongst us, a lamentable failure. The art of painting in England was to do homage to Shakspeare. The commercial boldness of a tradesman built a gallery in which the Reynoldses, and Wests, and Romneys, and Fuselis, and Northcotes, and Opies, might consecrate, by the highest efforts of painting, the inspiration which was to be borrowed from Shakspeare. The gallery was opened ; the works were munificently paid for ; they were engraved ; the text of Shakspeare was printed in larger type than the world had ever seen, to be a fit vehicle for the engravings. People exclaimed that Italy was outdone. With half a dozen exceptions, who can now look upon those works and not feel that the inspiration of Shakspeare was altogether wanting ? It is not that they violate the proprieties of costume, which are now better understood ; it is not that we are often shocked by the translation of a poetical image into a palpable thing—like the grinning fiend in Reynolds’s “ Death of Beaufort ;” but it is that the Shakspearean inspiration is not there. Lord Thurlow is reported to have said, in his course way, to one not wanting in talent,

“Romney, before you paint Shakspeare, do, for God’s sake, read him.” But the proper reading of Shakspeare was not the fragmentary reading which Thurlow probably had in his mind. The picturesque passages are to be easily discovered by a painter’s eye ; but these are the things which most painters will literally translate. Shakspeare is always injured by such a literal translation. Deeply meditated upon, his scenes and characters float before the mind’s eye in forms which no artifices of theatrical ellusion, no embodiments of painting and sculpture, have ever presented. If such visions are to be fixed by the pencil, so as to elevate our delight and add to our reverence of the great original, that result must be attained by such a profound study of the master, as a whole, as may place him in the light of the greatest of *suggestive* poets, instead of one whose details are to be enfeebled by a literal transcript.

We have little of importance left to notice before we reach the close of the eighteenth century, about which period we ought to rest. Opinions upon our contemporaries, except very general ones, would be as imprudent as misplaced. Perhaps we should notice in a few words the extraordinary forgeries of William Henry Ireland. We consider them as the result of the all-engrossing character of Shakspearean opinion in the days of the rivalries and controversies of Steevens and Malone, of Ritson and Chalmers : —

“ Take Markham’s Armoury, John Taylor’s Sculler,
 Or Sir Giles Goosecap, or proverbial Fuller ;
 With Upton, Fabell, Dodypoll the nice,
 Or Gibbe our cat, White Devils, or Old Vice ;
 Then lead your readers many a precious dance,
 Capering with Banks’s ‘ Bay Horse in a Trance :’
 The ‘ Housewife’s Jewel ’ read with care exact,
 Wit from old Books of Cookery extract ;
 Thoughts to stew’d prunes and kissing comfits suit,
 Or the potato, vigour-stirring root ;
 And then, returning from that antique waste,
 Be hail’d by Parr the Guide of Public Taste.” *

A clever boy, who had a foolish father whose admiration of Shakspeare took the form of longing, with an intensity which Mrs. Pickle could not have equalled, for the smallest scraps of Shakspeare’s writing, thought he would try his hand at the manufacture of a few such scraps — a receipt ; a mortgage-deed ; a Protestant Confession of Faith by William Shakspeare, to be placed in opposition to another forgery of a Roman Catholic Confession of Faith. This precious production thus concludes : — “ O cheryshe usse like the sweete Chickenne thatte under the covert offe herre spreadynge Winges Receyves herre lyttle Broode ande hoverynge overre themme keepes themme harmlesse ande in safetye.” Learned men came to read the confession of faith, and one affirmed that it was finer than anything in the Church Liturgy. Witty conundrums succeeded ; letters to Anne Hath-

* Pursuits of Literature.

away; memorandums connected with the theatre; a new edition of King Lear, with the author's last alterations; and, to crown the whole, an original play, "Vortigern and Rowena." The boy was evidently imbued with the taste of his time, and really fancied that he could mend Shakspeare. Hear one of his confessions:—"In King Lear the following lines are spoken by Kent after the King's death:—

'I have a journey, sir, shortly to go:
My master calls, and I must not say no.'

As I did not conceive such a jingling and unmeaning couplet very appropriate to the occasion, I composed the following lines:—

'Thanks, sir; but I go to that unknown land
That chains each pilgrim fast within its soil;
By living men most shunn'd, most dreaded.
Still my good master this same journey took:
He calls me; I am content, and straight obey:
Then, farewell, world! the busy scene is done:
Kent liv'd most true, Kent dies most like a man.'

The documents were published in the most expensive form. All the critics in the land came to look upon the originals. Some went upon their knees and kissed them. The "black-letter dogs" began to tear each other in pieces about their authenticity. Hard names were given and returned; dunce and blockhead were the gentlest vituperations. The whole controversy turned upon the colour of the ink, the water-mark of the paper,

the precise mode of superscription to a letter, the contemporary use of a common word, the date of the first use of promissory notes, the form of a mortgage. Scarcely one of the learned went boldly to the root of the imposture, and showed that Shakspeare could not have written such utter trash. The case of Chatterton was altogether a different one. There, indeed, was high genius wrongfully employed; but the enthusiastic admiration of the thing produced might well shut the eyes of the most acute to the inconsistencies which surrounded it. Not so with the new treasures which William Henry Ireland discovered from the pen of Shakspeare. The *people*, however, settled the question. The play was brought out at Drury Lane: and the prologue by Sir James Bland Burgess is another instance of the mode in which the poetasters and witlings venerated Shakspeare:—

“ From deep oblivion snatch’d, this play appears :
It claims respect, since Shakspeare’s name it bears ;
That name, the source of wonder and delight,
To a fair hearing has at least a right.
We ask no more. With you the judgment lies :
No forgeries escape your piercing eyes !
Unbiass’d, then, pronounce your dread decree,
Alike from prejudice or favour free.
If, the fierce ordeal pass’d, you chance to find
Rich sterling ore, *though rude and unrefin’d*,
Stamp it your own, assert your poet’s fame,
And add fresh wreaths to Shakspeare’s honour’d name.”
The people did pronounce their “dread decree.”
When Mr. Kemble uttered the line—

“ And when this solemn mockery is o’er ” —

“ the most discordant howl echoed from the pit that ever assailed the organs of hearing.” Shakspeare was vindicated.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a new school of criticism began to establish itself amongst us. Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt led the way in approaching Shakspeare, if not wholly in the spirit of *Æsthetics*, yet with love, with deep knowledge, with surpassing acuteness, with unshackled minds. But a greater arose. A new era of critical opinion upon Shakspeare, as propounded by Englishmen, may be dated from the delivery of the lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, at the Surrey Institution, in 1814. What that great man did for Shakspeare during the remainder of his valuable life can scarcely be appreciated by the public. For his opinions were not given to the world in formal treatises and ponderous volumes. They were fragmentary; they were scattered, as it were, at random; many of them were the oral lessons of that wisdom and knowledge which he poured out to a few admiring disciples. But they have had their effect. For ourselves, personally, we owe a debt of gratitude to that illustrious man that can never be repaid. If, during the progress of this edition, we have been enabled to present Shakspeare to the popular mind under new aspects, looking at him from a central point, which should permit us, however imperfectly, to comprehend something of his won-

drous SYSTEM, we owe the desire so to understand him ourselves to the germs of thought which are scattered through the works of that philosopher; to whom the homage of future times will abundantly compensate for the partial neglect of his contemporaries. We desire to conclude this outline of the opinions of others upon the works of Shakerpere, in connexion with the imperfect expression of our own sense of those opinions, with the name of —

COLERIDGE.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

THE order in which the thirty-six plays contained in the folio of 1623 are presented to the reader is contained in the following list, which forms a leaf of that edition :—

“ A CATALOGUE OF THE SEVERAL COMEDIES, HISTORIES, AND TRAGEDIES CONTAINED IN THIS VOLUME.

Comedies.

The Tempest.
 The Two Gentlemen of Verona.
 The Merry Wives of Windsor.
 Measure for Measure.
 The Comedy of Errors.
 Much Ado about Nothing.
 Love's Labour's Lost.
 Midsummer Night's Dream.
 The Merchant of Venice.
 As You Like It.
 The Taming of the Shrew.
 All's Well that Ends Well.
 Twelfth Night, or What You Will.
 The Winter's Tale.

Histories.

The Life and Death of King John.
 The Life and Death of King Richard II.
 The First Part of King Henry IV.
 The Second Part of King Henry IV.
 The Life of King Henry V.

The First Part of King Henry VI.
The Second Part of King Henry VI.
The Third Part of King Henry VI.
The Life and Death of Richard III.
The Life of King Henry VIII.

Tragedies.

Troilus and Cressida.
The Tragedy of Coriolanus.
Titus Andronicus.
Romeo and Juliet.
Timon of Athens.
The Life and Death of Julius Cæsar.
The Tragedy of Macbeth.
The Tragedy of Hamlet.
King Lear.
Othello, the Moor of Venice.
Antony and Cleopatra.
Cymbeline, King of Britain."

The general division here given of the plays into three classes is manifestly a discriminating and a just one. The editors were thoroughly cognizant of the distinction which Shakspeare drew between his Histories and Tragedies, as works of art. Subsequent editors have not so accurately seen this distinction; for they have inserted "Macbeth" immediately after the Comedies, and preceding "King John," as if it were a History, taking its place in the chronological order of events. It will be observed also that the original editors had a just regard to the order of events in their arrangement of the Histories, properly so called. But the order of succession in the Comedies and Tragedies must

be considered an arbitrary one. Subsequent editors have introduced an order still more arbitrary ; and to Malone belongs the credit of having endeavoured to place the Comedies and Tragedies in the order in which he supposed them to have been written. This arrangement took place in his posthumous edition ; but, his preliminary notices to each play consisting of the various opinions of the commentators generally, the advantage of considering each with reference to the supposed epoch of its production was very imperfectly attained in that edition. We therefore resolved, previous to the commencement of our "Pictorial Edition," to establish in our own minds certain principles, which should become to us a general guide, as to the order in which we should publish the Comedies and Tragedies ; still however keeping the classes separate, and not mixing them, according to their supposed dates, as Malone had done. But we did not pretend, nor even desire, to establish an exact date for the original production of each play. We attempted only to obtain a general notion of the date of their production in several groups. There would of course occur, with reference to each play, some detailed investigation, which would exhibit facts having a tendency to approximate that play to a particular year ; but we knew, and we have subsequently shown, that, with very few exceptions indeed, the confident chronological orders of Malone, and Chalmers, and Drake, have been

little more than guesses, sometimes ingenious and plausible, but oftener unsatisfactory and almost childish. But it appeared to us that there were certain broad principles to be kept in view, which would offer no inconsiderable assistance in forming a just estimate of the growth of the poet's powers, and of his peculiarities of thought and style at different periods of his life. It is obvious that upon some such estimate as this, however imperfect, much that is most valuable in any critical analysis of his works, and especially in any comparison with the works of his contemporaries, must in a large degree depend. The general views which we have taken differ considerably from those of our predecessors; and they do so for the most part, because we have more facts to guide us,—and especially the one fact that he was established in London, as a shareholder in the leading company of players, as early as the year 1589. We begin, therefore, by assuming that he was a writer for the stage five years at least before the period usually assigned for the commencement of his career as a dramatic poet. It may be convenient here briefly to recapitulate the reasons of this opinion which we have stated in various passages of our previous edition.

We shall first present an Abstract of Malone's last Chronological Order, as a case upon which to ground our argument.

			Poet's Age.
1.	First Part of King Henry VI.	- 1589	25
2.	Second Part of King Henry VI.	- 1591	27
3.	Third Part of King Henry VI.	- 1591	
4.	Two Gentlemen of Verona	- 1591	
5.	Comedy of Errors	- - - 1592	28
6.	King Richard II.	- - - 1593	29
7.	King Richard III.	- - - 1593	
8.	Love's Labour's Lost	- - - 1594	
9.	Merchant of Venice	- - - 1594	30
10.	Midsummer Night's Dream	- - - 1594	
11.	Taming of the Shrew	- - - 1596	
12.	Romeo and Juliet	- - - 1596	32
13.	King John	- - - 1596	
14.	First Part of King Henry IV.	- 1597	
15.	Second Part of King Henry IV.	- 1599	35
16.	As You like It	- - - 1599	
17.	King Henry V.	- - - 1599	
18.	Much Ado about Nothing	- - 1600	36
19.	Hamlet	- - - 1600	
20.	Merry Wives of Windsor	- - 1601	
21.	Troilus and Cressida	- - 1602	38
22.	Measure for Measure	- - 1603	39
23.	Henry VIII.	- - - 1603	
24.	Othello	- - - 1604	
25.	Lear	- - - 1605	41
26.	All's Well that Ends Well	- - 1606	42
27.	Macbeth	- - - 1606	
28.	Julius Cæsar	- - - 1607	
29.	Twelfth Night	- - - 1607	43
30.	Antony and Cleopatra	- - 1608	
31.	Cymbeline	- - - 1609	
32.	Coriolanus	- - - 1610	46
33.	Timon of Athens	- - - 1610	
34.	Winter's Tale	- - - 1611	
35.	Tempest	- - - 1611	47
36.	Pericles	- - -	
37.	Titus Andronicus	- - -	

Omitted as doubtful.

In 1598 Francis Meres published his "*Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury*," which contains the most important notice of Shakspeare of any contemporary writer : — "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage : for comedy, witness his 'Gentlemen of Verona,' his 'Errors,' his 'Love Labours Lost,' his 'Love Labours Won,' his 'Mid-summer's Night Dream,' and his 'Merchant of Venice ;' for tragedy, his 'Richard II.,' 'Richard III.,' 'Henry IV.,' 'King John,' 'Titus Andronicus,' and his 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

This notice fixes the date of thirteen plays, as having been produced up to 1598. But this list can scarcely be supposed to be a complete one. The expression which Meres uses, "for comedy *witness*," implies that he selects particular examples of excellence. We know that the three Parts of "Henry VI." existed before 1598 : we believe that "The Taming of the Shrew" was amongst the early plays ; and that the original sketch of "Hamlet," had been produced at the very outset of Shakspeare's dramatic career. "All's Well that Ends Well," we believe, also, to have been an early play, known to Meres as "Love's Labour's Won." But carry the list of Meres forward two years, and we have to add "Much Ado about Nothing" and "Henry V." which were then *printed*. The account, therefore, stands thus in 1600 : —

Plays mentioned by Meres, considering "Henry IV."						
as Two Parts	-	-	-	-	-	13
Henry VI., Three Parts	-	-	-	-	-	3
Taming of the Shrew	}	-	-	-	-	2
Hamlet (sketch)						
Much Ado about Nothing	}	-	-	-	-	2
Henry V.						
						—
						20

We have now seventeen plays, including "Pericles," left for the seventeenth century ; but some of these have established their claim to an earlier date than has been usually assigned to them. "Twelfth Night" and "Othello" were performed in 1602. Under the usual chronological order we are compelled, according to the analysis which we have just given, to crowd twenty plays into ten years. We shall have a still more difficult task to accomplish, if we accept the theory which has been laid down, by an authority which goes further even than Malone, that all "dramatic poets who had written plays prior to the years 1593 may be fairly considered the predecessors of Shakspeare *," assuming that previous to 1593 Shakspeare was altogether employed in mending the plays of others. But, putting aside "Titus Andronicus," Meres gives us a list of twelve original plays existing when his book was printed in 1598 — twelve plays which we would not exchange for all the contemporary dramatic literature produced in the years between 1593 and

* Collier's "Annals of the Stage," vol. i. p. 237.

1598. In support of these assertions, and these computations, not the slightest direct evidence has ever been offered. The indirect evidence constantly alleged against Shakspeare being a writer before he was twenty-seven years old is that he had obtained no reputation, and is not even mentioned by any contemporary, previously to the satirical notice of him in the last production of Robert Greene, who died in September, 1592, in which he is called "the only Shake-scene in the country." The very terms used by Greene would imply that the successful author of whom he was envious had acquired a reputation. But this is not the usual construction put on the words. The silence of other writers with regard to Shakspeare is minutely set forth by Malone; and his opinions, as it appears to us, have been much too implicitly received, — sometimes indolently, — sometimes for the support of a theory that would recognise Shakspeare as a mere actor, or, at most, as the repairer of other men's works, — whilst the original genius of Marlowe, and half a dozen inferior writers, was in full activity around him. The omission of all notice of Shakspeare by Webbe, Puttenham, Harrington, Sidney, are brought forward by Malone as unquestionable proofs that our poet had not written before 1591 or 1592. He says that in Webbe's "Discourse of English Poetry," published in 1586, we meet with the names of the most celebrated poets of that time, particu-

larly those of the dramatic writers Whetstone and Munday ; but that we find no trace of Shakspeare or of his works. But Malone does not tell us that Webbe makes a general apology for his omissions, saying, “ Neither is my abiding in such place where I can with facility get knowledge of their works.” “ Three years afterwards,” continues Malone, “ Puttenham printed his ‘ Art of English Poesy ;’ and in that work also we look in vain for the name of Shakspeare.” The book speaks of the one-and-thirty years’ space of Elizabeth’s reign ; and thus puts the date of the writing a year earlier than the printing. But we here look in vain for some other illustrious names besides that of Shakspeare. Malone has not told us that the *name* of Edmund Spenser is not found in Puttenham ; nor, what is still more uncandid, that not one of Shakspeare’s early dramatic contemporaries is mentioned — neither Marlowe, nor Greene, nor Peele, nor Kyd, nor Lyly. The author evidently derives his knowledge of “ poets and poesy ” from a much earlier period than that in which he publishes. He does not mention Spenser by *name*, but he does “ that other gentleman who wrote the late ‘ Shepherd’s Calendar.’ ” The “ Shepherd’s Calendar,” of Spenser was published in the year 1579. Malone goes on to argue that the omission of Shakspeare’s name, or any notice of his works, in Sir John Harrington’s “ Apology of Poetry,” printed in 1591, in which “ he takes occasion to

speaking of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time," is a proof that none of Shakspeare's dramatic compositions had then appeared. The "celebrated dramas" which Harrington mentions are Latin plays, and an old London comedy called "Play of the Cards." Does he mention "Tamburlaine," or "Faustus," or "The Massacre of Paris," or "The Jew of Malta?" As he does not, it may be assumed with equal justice that none of Marlowe's compositions had appeared in 1591; and yet we know that he died in 1593. So of Lyly's "Galathea," "Alexander and Campaspe," "Endymion," &c. So of Greene's "Orlando Furioso," "Friar Bacon," "James IV." So of the "Jeronimo" of Kyd. The truth is, that Harrington in his notice of celebrated dramas was even more antiquated than Puttenham; and his evidence, therefore, in this matter is utterly worthless. But Malone has given his crowning proof that Shakspeare had not written before 1591, in the following words:— "Sir Philip Sidney, in his 'Defense of Poesie,' speaks at some length of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise, but has not the slightest allusion to Shakspeare, whose plays, had they then appeared, would doubtless have rescued the English stage from the contempt which is thrown upon it by the accomplished writer; and to which it was justly exposed by the wretched compositions of those who proceeded our poet. 'The

Defense of Poesie ' was not published till 1595, but must have been written some years before." There is one slight objection to this argument: Sir Philip Sidney was killed at the battle of Zutphen, in the year 1586; and it is tolerably well ascertained that "The Defence of Poesie" was written in the year 1581.

If the indirect evidence that Shakspeare had not acquired any reputation in 1591 thus breaks down, we may venture to inquire whether the same authority has not been equally unsuccessful in rejecting the belief, which was implicitly adopted by Dryden and Rowe, that the reputation of Shakspeare as a comic poet was distinctly recognised by Spenser in 1591.

"He, the man whom Nature self had made
To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
With kindly counter, under mimic shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late:
With whom all joy and jolly merriment
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

Instead thereof scoffing Scurrility,
And scornful Folly, with Contempt, is crept,
Rolling in rhymes of shameless ribaldry,
Without regard or due decorum kept;
Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
And doth the Learned's task upon him take.

But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
Than so himself to mockery to sell."

Mr. Collier, in his "History of Dramatic Poetry," says of Spenser's "Thalia,"—"Had it not been certain that it was written at so early a date, and that Shakespeare *could not then* have exhibited his talents and acquired reputation, we should say at once that it could be meant for no other poet. It reads like a prophetic anticipation, which could not have been fulfilled by Shakespeare until several years after it was published." Mr. Collier, when he wrote this, had not discovered the document which proves that Shakspeare was a sharer in the Blackfriars Theatre at least a year before this poem was published. Spenser, we believe, described a real man, and real facts. He made no "prophetic anticipation;" there had been genuine comedy in existence; the ribaldry had been driven out for a season. We say, advisedly, that there is *absolutely no proof* that Shakspeare had *not* written "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Comedy of Errors," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Taming of the Shrew," and "All's Well that Ends Well," amongst his comedies, before 1590: we believe that he alone merited the high praise of Spenser; that it was meant for him.

What, then, is the theory which we build upon the various circumstances we have brought together, and which we oppose to the prevailing theory in England as to the dates of Shakspeare's works? We ask that the author of *twenty plays*, existing in 1600, which completely changed the face of

the dramatic literature of England, should be supposed to have begun to write a little earlier than the age of twenty-seven ; that we should assign some few of those plays to a period antecedent to 1590. We have reason to believe that, up to the close of the sixteenth century, Shakspeare was busied as an actor as well as an author. It is something too much to expect, then, even from the fertility of his genius, occupied as he was, that he should have produced twenty plays in nine years ; and it is still more unreasonable to believe that the consciousness of power which he must have possessed, should not have prompted him to enter the lists with other dramatists (whose highest productions may, without exaggeration, be stated as every way inferior to his lowest), until he had gone through a probation of six or seven years' acquaintance with the stage as an humble actor. We cannot reconcile it to probability that he who ceased to be an actor when he was forty should have been contented to have been only an actor till he was twenty-seven. We cling to the belief that Shakspeare, by commencing his career as a dramatic writer some four or five years earlier than is generally maintained, may claim, in common with his less illustrious early contemporaries, the praise of being one of the great founders of our dramatic literature, instead of being the mere follower and improver of Marlowe, and Greene, and Peele, and Kyd.

Our belief, then, as to the periods of the original

production of Shakspeare's Plays, shapes itself into something like the following arrangement : —

FIRST PERIOD, 1585 to 1593. From his 21st year to his 29th.

Titus Andronicus.

Hamlet. The first sketch.

Henry VI. Three Parts.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Comedy of Errors.

Love's Labour's Lost.

All's Well that Ends Well (perhaps imperfect).

Taming of the Shrew (the same).

SECOND PERIOD, 1594 to 1600. From his 30th year to his 36th.

Richard III.

Richard II.

Henry IV. Two Parts.

Henry V.

King John.

A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Romeo and Juliet.

Merchant of Venice.

Much Ado about Nothing.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

THIRD PERIOD, 1601 to 1607. From his 37th year to his 43rd.

As You Like it.

Twelfth Night.

Measure for Measure.

Hamlet (complete).

Othello.

Lear.

Macbeth.

Timon of Athens (probably revision of an earlier play).

FOURTH PERIOD, 1608 to 1616. From his 44th year to his death.

Cymbeline (probably revision of an earlier play).

A Winter's Tale.

Pericles (probably revision of an earlier play).

The Tempest.

Troilus and Cressida.

Henry VIII.

Coriolanus.

Julius Cæsar.

Antony and Cleopatra.

There is another view in which the chronological order of Shakspeare's plays may be regarded : and we think that it presents a key to the workings of his genius, in connexion with that desire which men of the highest genius only entertain, when a constant succession of new productions is demanded of them by the popular appetite,—namely, to generalize their works by certain principles of art, producing *novel* combinations ; which principles impart to groups of them belonging to the same period a corresponding identity. In Shakspeare this is to be regarded more especially with reference to the nature of the dramatic action. We put down these groups, rather as materials for thought in the reader, than as a decided expression of our own conviction ; because, all such circumstances and relations must be modified by other facts of which we have an incomplete knowledge.

THE TRAGEDY OF HORRORS.

Titus Andronicus	} Earliest period;— 1585 to 1588.
Hamlet. First sketch	
Romeo and Juliet. First sketch *	

ENGLISH HISTORY.

Of a Tragic Cast.

Henry VI. Three Parts	} Second early pe- riod ; — 1589 to 1593.
Richard III.	
Richard II.	

Of Mixed Tragedy and Comedy.

King John	} 1596 to 1599 ;— middle period.
Henry IV. Two Parts	
Henry V.	

COMEDY.

Two Gentlemen of Verona	} Second early pe- riod ; — 1589 to 1593.
Comedy of Errors	
Love's Labour's Lost	
All's Well that Ends Well	
Taming of the Shrew	
Midsummer Night's Dream	
Merchant of Venice	} 1594 to 1599 ; middle period.
Much Ado about Nothing	
Merry Wives of Windsor	
Twelfth Night	
Romeo and Juliet (complete)	

THE TRAGEDY OF PASSION AND CHARACTER.

Hamlet (complete)	} First matured pe- riod ; — 1600 to 1608.
Othello	
Lear	
Macbeth	

* Our reasons for considering the first "Hamlet" and "Romeo and Juliet" to belong to this class are given in a notice of the authenticity of "Titus Andronicus."

THE POETICAL LEGENDARY TALE, OR ROMANTIC
DRAMA.

As You Like It
Cymbeline
Winter's Tale
Tempest
Pericles

} First matured pe-
riod ; — 1600
to 1608.

TRAGI-COMEDY.

Measure for Measure
Troilus and Cressida
Timon of Athens

} Second matured
period; — 1609
to 1615.

ROMAN PLAYS.

Coriolanus
Julius Cæsar
Antony and Cleopatra

} Second matured
period; — 1609
to 1615.

Henry VIII.

We subjoin a Chronological Table of Shakspere's Plays, which we have constructed with some care, showing the *positive* facts which determine the dates *previous* to which they were produced.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

HENRY VI., Part I.	.	.	Alluded to by Nashe in	1592
			"Pierce Pennilesse."	
HENRY VI., Part II.	.	.	Printed as "The First	1594
			Part of the Contention."	
HENRY VI., Part III.	.	.	Printed as "The True	1595
			Tragedy of Richard	
			Duke of York.	
RICHARD II.	.	.	Printed	1597
RICHARD III.	.	.	Printed	1597
ROMEO AND JULIET	.	.	Printed	1597
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	.	.	Printed	1598
HENRY IV., Part I.	.	.	Printed	1598
HENRY IV., Part II.	.	.	Printed	1600
HENRY V.	.	.	Printed	1600
MERCHANT OF VENICE	.	.	Printed 1600. Mentioned	1598
			by Meres.	

300 CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM .	Printed 1600. Mentioned by Meres.	1598
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING .	Printed . . .	1600
AS YOU LIKE IT . . .	Entered at Stationers' Hall.	1600
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.	Held to be mentioned by Meres as "Love's Labour's Won."	1598
TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA .	Mentioned by Meres .	1598
COMEDY OF ERRORS . . .	Mentioned by Meres .	1598
KING JOHN . . .	Mentioned by Meres .	1598
TITUS ANDRONICUS . . .	Printed . . .	1600
MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR .	Printed . . .	1602
HAMLET . . .	Printed . . .	1603
TWELFTH NIGHT . . .	Acted in the Middle Temple Hall.	1602
OTHELLO . . .	Acted at Harefield .	1602
MEASURE FOR MEASURE .	Acted at Whitehall .	1604
LEAR . . .	Printed 1608. Acted at Whitehall.	1607
TAMING OF THE SHREW .	Supposed to have been acted at Henslow's Theatre, 1593. Entered at Stationers' Hall.	1607
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA .	Printed 1609. Previously acted at Court.	1609
PERICLES . . .	Printed . . .	1609
THE TEMPEST . . .	Acted at Whitehall .	1611
THE WINTER'S TALE . . .	Acted at Whitehall .	1611
HENRY VIII. . .	Acted as a new play when the Globe was burned.	1613

. Out of the thirty-seven Plays of Shakspeare, the dates of thirty-one are thus to some extent fixed in epochs. These dates are, of course, to be modified by other circumstances, which are stated in our introductory notice to each Play. There are only six Plays remaining, whose dates are not thus limited by publication, by the notice of contemporaries, or by the record of their performance; and these certainly belong to the poet's latter period. They are

MACBETH,	TIMON OF ATHENS,	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA,
CYMBELINE,	JULIUS CÆSAR,	CORIOLANUS.

END OF THE INTRODUCTORY VOLUME.

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